



Gina and Mauro Seghetti on their wedding day.



(Left to right): Dominique, Lauri, Robert, Mauro, Gina and Desiree Seghetti

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The roots of the Seghetti family extend into the history of Wandermere as early as the 1930s. Some may begin to recognize them more recently for reviving the treasured property that has been in their family for almost 80 years, Commellini Estates. Since the family has taken over the private restaurant, catering and event venue, they have made some new discoveries, made architectural changes and learned new stories about the history of their great aunt and uncle, Albert and Elide (Leda) Commellini.

### FAMILY & ORIGINS

Robert Seghetti is the son of Gina and Mauro Seghetti. Gina was the niece of Albert and Leda Commellini and helped run the restaurant from its early years, preparing authentic Italian dishes and hosting lavish parties for Spokane’s well-to-do.

Things changed in 1977, when Leda suffered a stroke and Gina became Leda’s caretaker. The family decided to lease out the business and has had six other tenants before the Seghettis, Robert, his wife Lauri and daughter Desiree took charge of it again in 2009. Lauri and Desiree manage and operate the business on a daily basis. Robert and Lauri have two daughters and a son: Dominique, Desiree and Damiano.

“As a family, we would struggle with not having a say with how things were ran. We wanted to really revive it and bring it back,” said Lauri. “We wanted to stay with the traditional Italian and keep with the legacy that was built here.”

Commellini Estates is named after Albert Commellini, who immigrated to America in 1904 and moved to Spokane in the early 1900s because of Spokane’s train transportation hub at the time. He was a well-known entrepreneur in the community and among his trades, he worked as a deputy sheriff, opened his own restaurant, started the ritzy Ambassador’s Club, managed a huge



Basement of Hotel D’Gink where Albert opened a soup kitchen during the depression.



Albert Commellini



(Left to right): Damiano, Desiree, Gina and Mauro at the Fairwood Farmers Market.



Gina Seghetti

chicken ranch and imported ingredients for moonshine through the Italian Importing Company.

### ALBERT & THE PROHIBITION

Albert was involved with the local police force but would take advantage of their resources and information to benefit the bootlegging industry.

“When police would confiscate liquor that came over the border from Canada, they would call him and then he would drive the vehicle out of the police department and then redistribute that liquor the next day. He also sold all the fixings for making whiskey, so the cops were always after him because he knew who all the moonshiners were,” said Robert.

The police could never prove Albert was breaking the law, however, because instead of keeping a record of his importing and transactions on paper, he kept all the information in his head.



Elide Commellini in the Kitchen at Commellini Estate.

Back before the 395 bridge near Wandermere, Dartford Road was the main transportation route for anyone traveling north to and from Canada. It was sometimes called the “Rum Road.” So consequently, during the prohibition time, Commellini’s property would become a convenient spot for travelers to store smuggled liquor.

Just in the past year, the Seghettis discovered an old tunnel about 20-feet wide angled down in the ground going into the hill behind their property, a tunnel in which they predict much of the illegal moonshine was stored. Barrel and old bottles were discovered in the tunnel and there are hopes to continue to uncover more hidden treasures.

### ATTENTION FROM MOBSTERS & CELEBRITIES

Was Commellini’s a hideout for mafia members back in the day? Many myths seem to have circulated about the restaurant’s patrons, but the only truthful connection, as Robert shared, involved the Ambassador’s Club.

The Ambassador’s Club was an extravagant dance hall with 15 private dining rooms, located downtown on Sprague Avenue. “Each of the rooms had exiting doors. So, if you had people, such as policemen, coming in through the front doors, guest could quickly exit through those doors without having to go by the policemen,” said Lauri.

In 1936, one of Al Capone’s brothers, Frankie, purportedly visited the club and expressed interest in purchasing it. Albert refused. The club ended up burning down less than a year afterward under strange and mysterious circumstances.

As for the many customers of Commellini’s restaurant, one of their most famous was the great baseball player Joe DiMaggio. While in Spokane for a visit, Joe had heard of Commellini’s and arrived there spontaneously for dinner one night. To his surprise, he was refused by Leda, who wouldn’t accommodate anyone without a reservation well in advance. He ended up coming back the next evening, but that time, with a reservation.

Even though Albert may have been involved with the illegal liquor trade he was a very giving person and during the depression fed many people at The Hotel D’Gink. This was also documented by the *Spokesman Review*.

*continued...*



The Ambassador's Club

READING STORIES IN OLD LETTERS

Most recently, the family has been cleaning out of an old building on the property and come across old letters and records tracing back to the early days of the restaurant and the chicken ranch that Albert and Leda ran behind the restaurant.

"There was a letter we came across from Albert where he was complaining about the price of chicken feed increasing," said Lauri. One letter they discovered contained a request for the make and model of Albert's vehicle. "The letter warned him to be on high alert that the government may need the vehicle turned over to them at a moment's notice to be used for the war," said Lauri.



The band on the opening night at the Ambassador's Club.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The Seghettis look forward to continuing the legacy of Commellini's, reflecting in its architecture and food. Recently Commellini's launched a product line featuring Leda and Gina's famous recipes, including the Chicken Cacciatore, Meatballs, Leda's Meat Sauce, Albert's White Wine Alfredo and Gina's Marinara Sauce. Items are available for order at the Commellini.com website and at the Fairwood Farmer's Market. They also hope to add more Restaurant Nights where guests can come out to dinner, in addition to reserving the estate for events. The family is excited to



Albert Commellini Importing Company, the company that brought in the ingredients to produce moonshine.



Family Christmas Photo: Gina, Elide, Mauro and Albert

grow and rebuild Commellini's reputation of classy and delicious fine-dining.

To be added to the Commellini Estate Member newsletter and receive updates on restaurant and event announcements check out commellini.com/members-events/.

If you would like to share your family story, email Maria.Ladd@n2pub.com.

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