

Noted N.Y. area retailer dies in accident

Lou Iacucci succeeded in introducing thousands of people to Italian wines

by Fenella Pearson

Louis Iacucci, 52 years old, owner of Goldstar Wines and Spirits in Forest Hills, N.Y., and an authority on Italian wines, died in Siena on February 25 of a heart attack following an automobile accident. He is survived by his wife, Lucy, and two daughters, Anna and Lisa.

My friend Lou was one of the kindest, most generous persons I have ever had the good fortune to know, as thousands of others also realized, because everywhere Lou went he made friends — not just acquaintances but true friends who loved and respected him.

Lou loved life and people. If he was interested in something or somebody, he wanted to know everything about that thing or person. Lou was a perfectionist and he lived by the philosophy that if something was worth doing it should be done properly or not at all.

An eloquent example was the way he learned to speak Italian fluently by listening and speaking and by learning from his mistakes. When I first met Lou, he had only a few words of dialect learned at home as a child. At the time of his death, he spoke Italian perfectly. His accent was flawless and his vocabulary was wide and expressive.

Everyone knows about Lou's love of wine and food, his fine palate and his extensive knowledge. But not many knew of his great passion for opera. Lou adored opera, especially Italian opera. As a young man, he studied singing and his rich tenor voice would often startle customers at Goldstar as he delivered a perfect rendition of an aria from "La Traviata" from behind the bottle racks. Others will be surprised to learn that Lou was an accomplished athlete in his youth, an excellent cyclist and a tournament bowler.

Lou Iacucci was born in Brooklyn on March, 17, 1936, the only son of immigrants from Calabria. He graduated from Fort Hamilton High School and went straight into the liquor busi-

ness, working his way through all phases of his chosen trade. He began as a stock boy in a local liquor store and then moved into the wholesale business, taking a position with Star Industries. By 1959, the year he married Lucy Balsamo, he had been promoted to salesman.

In those days, wine still played an extremely minor role in the industry. Those were the days of fancy cocktails, mixed drinks and beer. Few people knew anything about wine and the selection in stores and restaurants was mediocre. In keeping with his thirst for knowledge, Lou made it his business to read all the trade journals and study marketing reports so that he would be able to do his job better and more professionally than his competitors.

It was not long before he began to realize that there was a big vacuum in the industry and that wine was bound to become more popular. His reaction was predictable. He began to scour the libraries for books on wine and tasted everything he could get his hands on. From that moment on, Lou was a confirmed wine lover.

Lou purchased Goldstar Wine & Spirits, a large retail store in the fashionable Forest Hills section of Queens, in the early seventies. From the beginning, his aim was to try to fill the wine vacuum and share his knowledge about wines with his customers and friends. He traveled extensively through the European vineyards in his quest for fine wines to offer his clients and he rapidly developed a reputation as one of the finer wine retailers in the New York metropolitan area. His fame spread quickly and people traveled considerable distances to stock their cellars with wines from Lou's store. His judgments were implicitly trusted.

I met Lou at the end of 1977 at a turning point in both our careers. I had just joined the Italian Wine Center to promote Italian products in the United States and Lou had recently realized that Italy was making some of the best wines in the world and that their value was unbeatable. We helped each other learn. I provided Lou with



information about Italian wines and resources. Lou gave me precious information on how to promote Italian wines to the U.S. public. His advice was instrumental in our planning of promotional campaigns.

As Lou learned about Italian wines through his numerous trips to Italy, he became obsessed with sharing the fine wines he had discovered with his customers. People who came into his store for a French or West German wine were tactfully steered toward the Italian section and given a slightly biased sales pitch. Lou was instrumental in introducing countless small Italian wine producers to American wine lovers and in persuading friends in the import business to bring in unknown labels and then getting his customers to try some of his new finds. And in the process, he won many converts to Italian wines.

Iacucci, or Luigi as he was generally known to his Italian friends, was probably the best-known American in Italian wine circles. The reaction to his death was one of shock, whether in the United States or Italy. Goldstar and Lou's family received many hundreds of phone calls and messages of condolence.

His wife, Lucy, a strong, intelligent, warm and generous person, is determined that Lou's efforts should not be dissipated. She will continue to operate Goldstar and, though she knows she has much to learn and that some changes will have to be made, she is confident that she will be able to continue the work that Lou began.