

Poignant artwork on display at Faith Fest

✖ Musical acts, a zipline, a dunk-a-seminarian booth and fireworks are among the attractions at the first Faith Fest, a Sept. 16 festival sponsored by the parishes of Harford County.

Its offerings also include a museum-worthy exhibit that displays a patriarch's talent and faith during World War II, the bulk of which he spent as a prisoner of war.

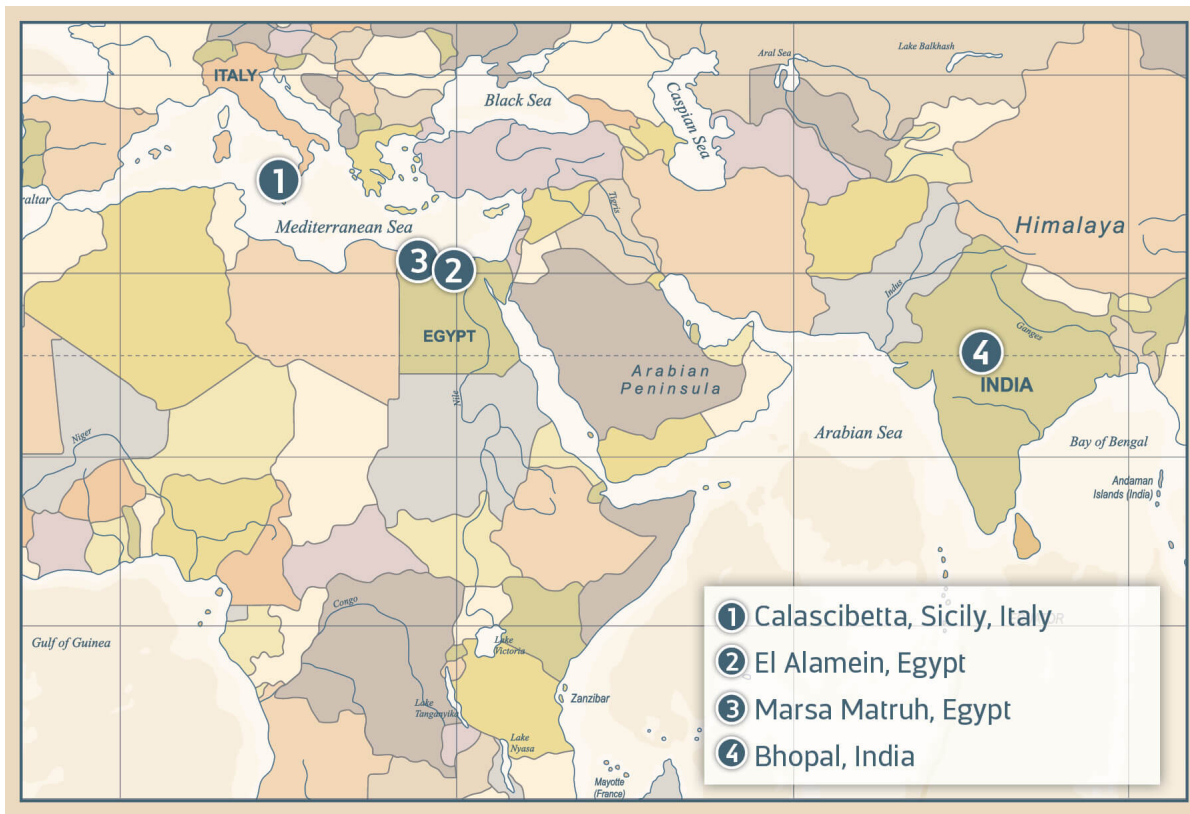
Giuseppe Bongiorno was a shepherd in his native Sicily and baked bread when he first came to America, where he eventually settled in as a laborer at a rubber products plant in Kingsville and parishioner of old St. Bernard in Baltimore.

He was also an artist.

In World War II, Bongiorno fought for Italy, part of the Axis that included Germany and Japan. Just before Christmas in 1940, he was captured by British forces in Egypt, and spent the next four-plus years at a POW camp in Bhopal, India, which would become infamous for a 1984 chemical disaster.

LONG ROAD

Giuseppe Bongiorno had plenty of war stories to share when he brought his family from Sicily to Baltimore in 1958.



1. Feb. 26, 1912 - Born in Calascibetta, Sicily, Italy
2. June 10-Nov. 21, 1940 - Fought in Buch Buch during battle of El Alamein, Egypt
3. December 10, 1940 - Captured by British forces in Marsa Matruh, Egypt
4. June 7, 1941-April 28, 1945 - Prisoner of war in Bhopal, India

Source: Family of Giuseppe Bongiorno

Over the course of his travail, Bongiorno gathered the socks of deceased prisoners and painstakingly fashioned the yarn into three religious renderings and a letter home, which at several junctures, according to his family, he assumed he would never see again.

Bongiorno survived the ordeal and came to Baltimore in 1958, along with his wife,

Pietra, and their four children, following his brother, Vincenzo, who ran a market near the intersection of Greenmount Avenue and 33rd Street, a Waverly crossroads.

Bongiorno died in 1997, at age 85. The heirlooms have since been preserved behind glass, in 2-foot-by-3-foot frames. When his descendants gather on special occasions, such as Christmas Eve, they are on display, along with cod specialties and Italian sweets.

“Dad didn’t talk about the war,” said Lena Sapienza, one of his daughters, whose family worships at St. Mark in Fallston. “We didn’t appreciate all this until after he was gone. There is a lot of work there.”

The letter was translated by her husband, Sal, who recalls being held back when he entered St. Michael the Archangel School in Overlea, as Italian was the language of choice in his home and his English was “subpar.”

The letter mentions Mediterranean locales linked to famous World War II battles, such as Messina in Italy, El Alamein in Egypt and Tobruk in Libya.

After Faith Fest, the items will return to the homes of Bongiorno’s children: the stitching of Jesus to Frances Sutherland, of St. Ursula in Parkville; Santa Lucia to Joseph Bongiorno, of St. Margaret in Bel Air; the Blessed Virgin Mary to the Sapienza household; and the letter to John Bongiorno, also a parishioner of St. Mark in Fallston.