AMERICAN-INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE OF FLORENCE
ONLUS
The Spirit of Giving

50 Years of Friendship and Community Service

THE AILO STORY 1975 – 2025

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WELCOME TO AILO

The **PURPOSE OF THE AILO BOOKLET** is threefold. *Firstly,* it is to mark AILO's 50th anniversary as an Association. This is an important landmark which deserves celebration. It is meant as a keepsake for all the members who dedicate so much of their time in taking part in AILO's varied activities and in promoting friendship and understanding between it and the Italian community. By retracing these five decades here, members will be reminded that they are right to be proud of the many achievements over the years, especially in raising funds for innumerable charities within Florence and its province.
Secondly, the Booklet will serve as an introduction to newcomers who wish to join AILO, and it will be a welcome for them as well as an understanding of AILO's mission, history, and activities. *Thirdly,* and perhaps most importantly, AILO wishes the Booklet to act as its "visiting card" to explain its aims, past accomplishments, and its aspirations to the public bodies, institutions, donors, and charities that the AILO will be working with and for in the future.

The American-International League of Florence - AILO ONLUS ***(Organizzazione Non Lucrativa di Utilità Sociale)*** is a non-profit, charity association based in Florence, Italy, with an international membership. Founded in 1975, it is included in the national registry of Italian Voluntary Organizations, according to the 2017 Italian law reform of the Third Sector Institutions. The members of AILO are from many different countries, including Italy, who live or have lived in Tuscany. The honorary president is the United States Consul General in Florence.
English is the working language of the Association, which is used at all meetings, events and for its publications.

AILO's mission and purpose is to contribute to the community's well-being through projects of social assistance and fund-raising for charities in the "spirit of giving" within the city and province of Florence. It also endeavors to promote friendship and understanding between its members and the Italian community through cultural and social events.

The Association is proud to have been recognized by the City of Florence in 2011 with the prestigious *Leone del Marzocco Award*, presented to individuals and organizations of merit which have significantly contributed to the welfare of the City.

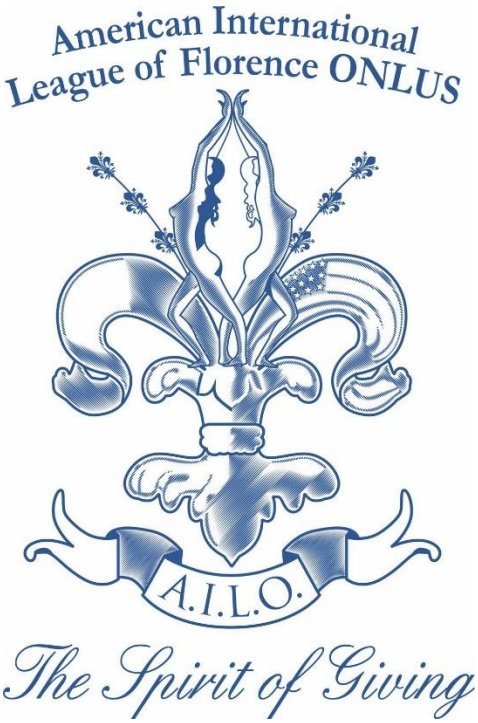
Recipient of Florence's prestigious Leone Del Marzocco Award

AILO is also a member of the Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO), an international network of independent American volunteer clubs and associations situated in countries all over the world.

The registered mailing address of the Association is: Studio Viviani, Via di Novoli (Villa Demidoff) 50127 Firen*ze*

Being a registered Charity organization, it is possible to donate "5 per Mille" to AILO in the yearly Italian Tax form, with its TAX code number CF 94071460482.

THE LOGO



AILO's Florentine 'Giglio'-Lilium Logo was designed by member *Beatrice Coppini* in order to honor the Club's host city, with the two side petals representing the flags of Italy and the United States of America. The two female figures are placed back-to-back to depict individuality and differences in background, culture, and ideas, but their hands are touching in friendship, and their arms reach up and out towards new goals and challenges. In 2018, the logo was revised by updating the type of organization (ONLUS) and adding the words ***"The Spirit of Giving".***

AILO HISTORY, MILESTONES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Beginning

In **1974,** the **LADIES' GUILD OF FLORENCE** of St. James Church was formed and met once a month at the home of the American Consul General. At the time, it was the only organized group of American women in the city and was church oriented.
Many newcomers were not, however, interested in the church's activities, but felt a need to make contact with other English speakers. Some were homesick and wanted to share their experiences. Others wished to help new arrivals adjust to their new home. Visitors were welcome at the Ladies' Guild meetings and, as those present increased in number, the majority began to think of introducing social and cultural activities. However, this did not seem to fit the scope of a Ladies' Episcopalian

Guild.
Therefore, a committee of old and new members of the Ladies' Guild was formed to decide what sort of club they wanted, its purpose, its membership, its management, and, last but not least, its name. The need to draft a Constitution and By-Laws arose out of those discussions.

1975-1980

In the spring of **1975**, the Ladies' Guild was formally dissolved and the **American International League - AIL** was founded. AIL organized a monthly luncheon at the Park Palace Hotel and a speaker was always invited. At that time, members were long term residents of Florence, usually married to Italians and membership was open to both women and men. Male members were mostly the husbands of the female members. A *monthly bulletin* was sent to members with information about the activities for the month.

The objective of AIL was to keep in touch with American residents and to give legal and practical help on matters of citizenship, on how to vote in the US and update them on US tax regulations. There was no defined charitable policy as yet. General Meetings were held in St James Church undercroft and AIL was given a small room there in which to store and work on Bazaar merchandise, as an *annual Christmas Bazaar* was held each year from the time AIL was instituted. It also took place in the undercroft, and at the beginning, the idea was that money made at the Bazaar was to fund AIL's activities including social events for members, such as a St. Valentine's party and to pay running costs so that AIL dues did not become too high. Some very small amounts of money were given to charity through requests made to AIL by priests or by members. For instance, a local school which trained seeing-eye dogs was given the money raised at the first Bazaar.

In **1976**, the first *AIL Constitution* was presented. Annual dues for members were 3,000 lire.
A *Roster* or list of members' names, addresses and telephone numbers was made available to all members. A two-page monthly bulletin was sent to members with information about the activities for the month.

In **1977**, AIL joined the *Federation of American Women's Club Overseas* (FAWCO), a very significant milestone. Initially, FAWCO required that a member club had 70% American membership which meant that candidates from other countries could only become Associate Members until a place became available for them in the remaining 30% quota. In the same year, new *AIL Standing Rules and By-Laws* were passed, also to accommodate a new position on the Board for a FAWCO representative and to create separate *Chairs for Zones' Leadership and Computer Operations.*

In **1980**, through an AIL member who had a very sick child, AIL obtained permission from the then Director of the Department of Pediatrics at the Meyer Children's Hospital, Professor Giorgio Bartolozzi, to volunteer as community service assistants to the children and their families. About 20 members volunteered and worked in two shifts a day in almost all of the hospital wards. They dressed up as Mickey Mouse ladies wearing Mickey Mouse aprons over their white coats and Mickey Mouse ears. The aim was to provide entertainment and company, particularly for the children from other parts of Italy whose parents could not afford to stay in Florence. This was unprecedented at that time, because not even the parents were allowed into the hospital wards outside visiting hours. Gradually, AIL had more money available for donation. This was usually given as a single donation per year, particularly to the Meyer Children's Hospital.

1981-1990

In **1981**, an AIL member was instrumental in the establishment of the Florence branch of the *Associazione Volontari Ospedalieri* (AVO). Most of the Mickey Mouse ladies, as well as other new AIL members, joined AVO, with which AILO is still collaborating today. Some signed up with the US Consulate List of Interpreters available to assist hospitals and doctors throughout Florence.

In **1989**, with the evolution of more 'modern' technology in the form of a word processor, the old Olivetti typewriter used to prepare the AIL *Newsletter* (this had replaced the old Bulletin) was discarded. A Newsletter team was formed, and the Park Palace hotel gave the group the gate keeper's house to use as an office. The articles were printed out, proofread, cut to size in a mockup copy of the Newsletter and then sent to the printer. Once back from the printer, the team put the copies in envelopes and posted them out to members.

Between 1988 and 1990, collaboration between AIL as well as more exchange with the various other women's groups/associations in Florence was begun, particularly in relation to culture and to what they were doing in Florence. The two main groups were the Centro Studi, Cultura e Progresso and F.I.D.A.P.A., the Federation Italiana Donne Nelle Arti, Professioni, Affari. In **April 1989,** the then

La cosmonauta sovietica Svetlana Savizkaja

President of AIL was invited by F.I.D.A.P.A. to attend a reception for the Russian cosmonaut, Svetlana Evgen'evna Savickaja. On her second trip to Salyut 7, she became the first woman to perform a spacewalk when, on July 25, 1984, she participated in welding experiments on the outer hull of the space station.

In 1990, again the AIL President, together with F.I.D.A.P.A. organized a public conference entitled *Verso Quale Europa?* It lasted for two days and was held in a conference room of *The Nazione* newspaper. It was covered by about 5 members of the press, including *The Nazione,* with the participation of many important personalities

In mid-**1990**, the wife of the United States' Ambassador to Italy, Joan Secchia, made a visit to AIL in Florence for a luncheon with members at the Park Palace Hotel.

The first *Night Owl* meetings started up for members who worked and were unable to attend the monthly morning General Meeting. During these evening occasions held in members' homes, AIL business and activities for the month were outlined and, after a talk by a guest speaker, a light dinner was served.

1991-2000

In the years **1991-1994,** new social and fundraising activities were experimented, including two Fashion Shows with members as models, a gala Christmas dinner dance at the Villa Corsini at Maiano for members, their families, and friends and weekly meditation classes, offered by a Swedish member.

In **1998**, an outstanding milestone was achieved when, in October, AIL became AILO, an ONLUS (Non-Profit Organization for Social Utility), officially registered according to Italian law under the name of "The American International League of Florence – ONLUS. Immediately afterwards, the AILO Constitution, Standing Rules and By-Laws were amended to comply with its new legal status.

In **1999**, a new, now much loved, tradition was introduced with the first annual Susan Bianchini Memorial *Pinocchio Award* being presented in June to a member for her service to AILO during the prior year.

In the same year, AILO's Culture Chair organized a cultural trip to Prague for members, their families, and friends and then a similar trip to Budapest was proposed for the following year**.**

The Susan Bianchini Pinocchio Award 1999

Susan Bianchini's original intention was to present a little Pinocchio as a humorous gift to a Board Member, in recognition of spirited and loyal service to the League, and to liven up the last Meeting of the year. But then, it also became the mark of a momentous, historical achievement: the League had just become an ONLUS. It is always passed on in Susan's name, she herself having been a loyal and high-spiritedmember, never afraid to be fun.
In 2003, a smaller Pinocchio award was added, presented by Roberta Magni, since there are so many extraordinary members who deserve recognition.
So the Pinocchios are passed on at each June General Meeting by the previous recipients, to two members whom they choose, for whatever reason they wish, which may be revealed to the assembly or kept to themselves.
It is presumed that one of those reasons is in recognition of spirited and loyal service.

2001-2010

In March **2002**, AILO hosted the FAWCO Interim Conference in Florence at the Hotel Mediterranean. Fifty-one FAWCO clubs from around the world attended, with 175 delegates and 45 guests present. The Welcome Reception was held in the *Sala del Cinquecento* at Palazzo Vecchio with the City Alderman of Cultural Affairs and the US Consul in Florence as keynote speakers. On the second evening, an apericena was given at Palazzo Ferragamo and on the third, dinners at the homes of members were offered. On the last evening, a gala evening took place at the Castello di Verrazzano.

In **2003**, the "*Left Footers" Entertainment Community Service* group was formed by about ten AILO members. They started by practicing country and western line-dancing and then learned Gaelic dances at St James Church, taught by expert dancers, nieces of a "Left Footer." Apart from dancing, they told jokes, played musical instruments, and acted in short plays, written by one of the group. The "Left Footers" became very popular as they visited and performed at senior citizens' and nursing homes throughout the city.

In the same year, the first edition of an AILO "La Dolce Vita Cookbook" was printed. It was 196 pages of only dessert recipes in English and Italian. A couple of years later, a second cookbook was produced

called “A Prelude to a Feast,” featuring delicious appetizers.

In **2005**, the *Donation Day Ceremony* in Palazzo Vecchio was inaugurated. This proved to be a great achievement and an enormous success for AILO, as emerges in the testimony of Luciana Fava Giles, President of AILO from 2004 to 2006.

DONATION DAY: GENESIS

by Luciana Fava Giles

When I was elected President of AILO in 2004, it was a privilege for me because I was the first Italian to hold that position.

My first approach was to find out about the key matters that made AILO run: its administration, social activities, fundraising and so on. Among these activities was the yearly Bazaar and the donation of its proceeds to charities in Florence and its province, which were voted on by AILO members. In that respect, I learned that the official representatives of the selected beneficiaries were invited to a General Meeting where each was presented with a plaque and a cheque as financial support for their urgent needs.

Something clicked in my mind. The money was raised publicly through the Bazaar, therefore, why not give the "donations" in a public environment. After discussing the matter with my husband John, my major supporter, I decided to bring the matter before the Florentine authorities. I paid a visit to the Mayor of Florence at Palazzo Vecchio to explain my project to him. In his absence, his assistant gave me audience. At first, she said she had never heard of AILO but, after listening to me tell her about it, she was fascinated by my idea to the point that she decided on the spot to introduce me to the city's Master of Ceremonies in order to work on what would later become AILO's "Donation Day".

That very day this official accompanied me to the Salone de' Cinquecento where we discussed the details necessary for preparing the event. Whilst was I listening to the long list of things to be done, I feebly asked: "I suppose all of this is at zero cost?" "Of course!" he replied. Was I thrilled? .... certainly!

And so we got started, firstly by telling the AILO members about it at the next General Meeting. Some did not want change but a past President stood up and, in my defence, said out loud: "Do you all realize what Luciana has obtained? There are hundreds of thousands of people from the entire globe who come to Florence and visit the Salone de' Cinquecento!"

Next step was the formation of a Committee to work on the event. So it was that, in 2005, "Donation Day" was born and it is still being celebrated on a yearly basis.

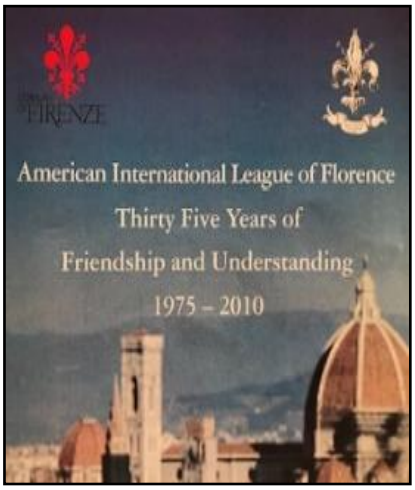
In **2009,** the location of the General Meetings moved from the Park Palace Hotel to the British Institute's Harold Acton Library on Lungarno Guicciardini. It continues to be a perfect setting with the beautiful, recently renovated Acton Heritage Room and the separate area for members to greet each other and enjoy the welcome coffee/tea and croissants, as well as the mid-morning break. There is space for the various Chairs (usually Membership, Night Owl and Social) to set up their tables for administrative exchanges and bookings and to manage ballot collections on voting days. Gathering at this location has allowed AILO members to mingle with the Anglo-Florentine community and consolidate their mutual friendship and collaboration during reciprocal cultural and fundraising events.
In the same year, the first annual ceremony was held in October at the US Consulate to celebrate those who had been AILO members for 25 years or more. A total of 49 members were honored on that occasion.

In **2010**, the Procedure Manual was rewritten, and the job descriptions were updated for each AILO

Board Chair so that future Board members would be able to understand their roles before accepting the position. It also served as a ready reference of what was expected of them during their two-year term. This was the year of AILO's 35th anniversary and the occasion for which Donation Day in April was christened with that official name.

That same year, AILO also hosted a **Region 8 FAWCO Meeting** from 12-14 February with the participation of the other Italian clubs from Milan, Turin, Genoa, Rome, and Naples, as well as the FAWCO groups from Belgium, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Switzerland, and USA. Over 100 participants took part and AILO organized very popular in-home dining so that visiting participants could enjoy the experience of being in members' homes.

2011-2023



In 2010, the Heritage of AILO 1975-2010 was published in the first edition of an AILO Booklet, in celebration of its 35th anniversary.

In the *foreword*, the President of the City Council of Florence expressed the gratitude of the administration for the work AILO has carried out since its foundation. He wrote of AILO's unselfish and passionate actions in favor of the city's social welfare and his appreciation of the traditional reunion in Palazzo Vecchio in honor of its annual donations.

The *concluding remarks* of the booklet were dedicated "AILO's Future." Looking towards the years ahead, immersed in globalization, a series of questions were raised: "What will be the impact of the last 35 years on the future ones? "What will be the differences between yesterday and tomorrow?" "How will AILO meet the new challenges?" It was suggested that AILO should converge on common goals by sharing ideas and experiences and striving always towards doing better and… never giving up!

The accomplishments over these past years have indeed shown that AILO has continued to strive hard and not give up, both in maintaining its traditions and managing new challenges. The annual Bazaar has continued to be very successful, allowing donations to be given to more than 371 projects involving 191 charities adding up to a total of approximately €800,000.00 while AILO's support to FAWCO has also been very significant. Community Service activities have been consolidated and expanded, like, for instance, those involving the Iris Garden and the Caritas soup kitchen. AILO's social media and presence online have also increased over the years.

In **2014** a survey was carried out to review the status of AILO, in order to bring to light its

strengths and all that was functioning well and to identify and deal with other aspects that required improvement. During this period, members concentrated on networking with the Councilors at Palazzo Vecchio and getting the Press Conference for the Bazaar established with the official Press Office. In the same year, the Iris Garden Community Service was started, where members worked together with volunteers from the *Angeli del Bello* Association.

The logo was renewed to adapt to the new status of the Association as an ONLUS and the words *The Spirit of Giving* were officially added to the emblem at the same time, and a hyphen was put in between American and International in AILO's name to honor the equal value of all members.

In **2018,** AILO had the great pleasure of being involved for quite a few months in the *International Breast Cancer Dragon Boat Paddler Festival* held in Florence on the River Arno at the Cascine Park, on 7th and 8th July, with the paddling teams staying at least a full week in the city. It was the first time the event had been held in a non-English speaking country.

A brief history of the Breast Cancer Dragon Boat Movement.

In 1996, a sports medicine specialist at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Dr. Don McKenzie started it as a small research study. He questioned why patients with breast cancer should be told not to engage in strenuous and repetitive upper body exercises after any surgical node dissection and radiation therapy. So, Dr. McKenzie set about testing his theory by recruiting 22 women who had undergone breast cancer treatment to make up a dragon boat crew. Carefully monitored, they trained for six months and were launched onto the unsuspecting dragon boat community for the first time in 1996. None of the women developed lymphedema and the original 22 refused to stop paddling and so a world-wide movement was born.

The Dragon Boat festival is held every couple of years in a different country, with the aim of supporting breast cancer awareness.

In the months before the race, two AILO members were entrusted with finding "ambassadors" for the 130 paddling teams visiting from all over the world. Many AILO members, together with people from other expat groups and Florentines, became ambassadors, acting as assistants and interpreters to the mainly English-speaking team members and their families.

More than three-thousand-woman paddlers took part, all survivors of breast cancer. The opening ceremony was held in *Piazza della Signoria*, with a parade of the teams, their families, friends, and ambassadors arriving from *Palazzo Pitti*.

It was amazing to see all these women in the Square and then paddling on the Arno.

The whole event was an enormous success, with only a few hiccups, and much laughter and friendship were shared by all.

In May of 2017 and 2018, AILO launched into the new, experimental fundraising venture by holding an ambitious spring "May Fayre" in the grounds of a member's country villa, with the patronage of the local Municipality of San Casciano. It was a smaller, outdoor version of the Christmas Bazaar, which, however, ended up requiring a similar amount of hard work. Tables and umbrellas for sales' booths, food and beverages were set up in the beautiful garden.
The biggest novelty, compared to the Bazaar, was the presence of 22 external stalls with specialty food outlets, craft vendors and guest association representatives, who were asked to give small donations to AILO. The most popular offer of the day was the English afternoon tea, served in real teacups and saucers and home-made scones with jam and cream.

The two events were perfect, except for the final cost-benefit analysis: all the work involved in putting on the event unfortunately outweighed the proceeds made. The main problem was a lack in numbers of patrons. So, the initiative was judged as not economically feasible and, with regret, was suspended for the time being.

Other achievements in this period were the awards that AILO gained from FAWCO (*see details in section*) and the medal that the Association *Pane Quotidiano* gave AILO at its 120th Anniversary ceremony in Palazzo Vecchio, in recognition of its respect and esteem for AILO's support and relentless attention to people in need.

More highlights of **2018** were the presence of the US Consul General of Florence, Benjamin V. Wohlauer, at the Donation Day ceremony in Palazzo Vecchio and the first distribution of AILO's hand-made red scarves between November to February to the regulars of the Caritas soup kitchen in Via Baracca. Of the 78 scarves, the first to find an owner was *Marilyn's scarf*, a very pretty, crocheted one, different from the rest, made by a very special member. It was chosen by a shy, young woman, in bare feet and flip flops on that cold winter's day, who immediately put it around her slender neck and smiled with thanks.

AILO's *Club in Motion* also started up in **2018**. This is a fun, FAWCO project to encourage members to stay healthy and physically and mentally fit by organizing walks in the company of fellow members and friends. It is based on the worldwide knowledge of the health benefits from regular exercise, even if simple walking. So, with help of a WhatsApp organizer, the AILO walkers and their dogs were enjoying not only this very economical physical activity, but also the beautiful excursions easily available on foot in Florence and its surroundings. The idea is to keep track each time of the number of members and the kilometers walked and send on the multiplication of the two to FAWCO.

2019 started off with a wonderful, organized visit to Kenya with the participation of a large group of AILO members.

The Kenya Adventure

In May, as is an annual tradition, members represented AILO and laid a wreath at the Memorial Day Commemoration at the Florence American Cemetery. AILO's new Constitution was concluded with the final approval vote in June. During these last years, energy has also been invested into nourishing

the close relationship and mutual collaboration with, amongst others, the City of Florence, the British Institute and Library, St James Church, the Tuscan-American Association, the Australians In Florence Group, the Municipality di San Casciano and The Florentine Newspaper and Vista Magazine. The Park Palace continues to be the enjoyable location for the Welcome Back Tea in September and the end of year June General Meeting and lunch, as well as the Ugolino Golf Club for the Thanksgiving Lunch.

Problem solving in progress The need for AILO to have a permanent location for a Clubhouse has emerged, which has space for members to work in and store the Bazaar merchandise.

2020

The year started off with the usual rest after the Christmas Bazaar, the Charity Donations' ballot in February, the planning of Donation Day in April, and the rest of the AILO year full steam ahead, but with the ever-increasing worry looming towards the end of February with the presence of the coronavirus infection in the Northern Regions of Italy.

The March to May Covid 19 *Shelter in place* Time

After the General Meeting on 3rd March, Florence and all of Italy were shut down at 2 a.m. the next morning, with everyone told to stay at home except for essential workers. More rules came out on 10th March. With the help and advice from members, the response of the president was communication. Over the following 3 months, the usual, smaller news items in the Friday Update email, were replaced by the President's Information Bulletin, all connected to staying safe and healthy: coronavirus facts and countermeasures, the spread both here and abroad, the Italian regulations and how to follow them, when, where and how to shop, entertainment options, professional opinions and general sources of info. Several WhatsApp chat groups kept much of the membership in contact. Everyone stayed grounded and productive, doing artwork, sewing, reading and, in light of the next Bazaar, busy too cleaning out cupboards and wardrobes to find suitable items to donate. The Newsletter appeared miraculously each month on the website, where the contributions and stories from the members recorded AILO's days on lockdown and kept up morale. The Board Chair positions becoming vacant in September were renewed in May by e-ballot elections. Although the official Donation Day in April was cancelled, bank transfers were organized and sent to the charities chosen this year. Two of these associations - the *Banco Alimentare della Toscana* and the *Cerchio Blu Protezione Civile* - worked hard during the difficult Covid 19 lockdown in Florence, when many people (tourist operators, restaurant, bar, and shop personnel) found themselves suddenly without an income. For their contribution to the community during the Covid-19 crisis, both these associations, together with other important volunteer groups, were awarded the *Fiorino d'Oro*, the city's highest civic recognition, by the Mayor, in a special ceremony in Piazza Santa Croce on 24th June, the feast day for the patron saint of Florence, St. John the Baptist.

In August, the lockdown had lifted, and life was getting back to normal.

2022-2023
Viva Vittoria Florence

Organized by AILO under the leadership of its President, Bergljot Leifsdottir, the League worked for two years with the Italian women's defense association Viva Vittoria to raise awareness of domestic violence by creating an installation in Piazza Santa Croce of around 3,500 hand- crocheted and knitted squares

covering the whole piazza on November 11, 2023. Unfortunately, the second scheduled day of the event had to be cancelled because of rain. However, seldom has the city seen such a joyous and colorful charity drive. The squares were made by groups of people throughout the city and from further afield like Iceland, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, the UK, and USA. They were then sold to those wishing to purchase them in order to raise monies for the nominated beneficiaries. Collection boxes were provided at Conad supermarkets in Florence and other generous supporters provided, amongst other things, storage space and yarn to ensure the overwhelming success of the project.

Beneficiaries of the Viva Vittoria Florence Project

1. **Artemisia Centro AntiViolenza**
   website: www.artemisiacentroantiviolenza.it

This well-known association gives assistance to women in situations of domestic violence, which can sometimes be quite dangerous. They provide safe housing for women and children, maintenance, psychological support, legal help, help to re-establish themselves in the workplace, self-help groups, plus their very important help center. This is the most prominent Center for assistance to women who suffer from domestic violence.

2. **ACISJF FIRENZE**
   Protezione della Giovane Donna
   website: www.Acisjf-Firenze.it

This association has been helping young women in difficulty since 1902, women who are alone and lack a support system, women with children who have suffered domestic violence. They give hope and financial assistance, a safe house, help with work, Italian and English lessons, afterschool for children who need to catch up for various reasons, plus a Help Center for psychological support. A kind and loving organization, bringing comfort to many women in distress.

3. **NOSOTRAS ONLUS**
   website: www.nosotras.it

Nosotras works principally with immigrant women in precarious situations, they fight against violence to women in general. They provide assistance for anyone who has suffered discrimination, give courses to improve their work possibilities, introduce empowerment. A complex program which is focused on the many problems facing immigrant women who arrive in Italy. They also have a program to stop Female Genital Mutilation and prevent the horror of child brides. Their work is not easy and requires constancy and courage.

AILO's 50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

In early 2025, a 50th Anniversary team from within AILO was set up for getting the ball rolling in organizing this very special event. Many events were programmed including this story, a fashion parade in May offered by one of our sponsors; the preparation and illustration of a Presidents' Cookbook of recipes typical of their original home countries; and a Anniversary dinner at the Ugolino Golf Club, with the presentation of small mementoes to those who attended.

We would like to thank the following
for their kindness in supporting
us in making this evening so special:
UGOLINO GOLF CLUB (venue)
MARINA RINALDI (donation)
EDVIGE COLEMAN (donation)
CATERINA CORSINI (red wine)
HELENE FALCHINI (white wine)
GIANI TRAMBUSTI (videographer)
ZONIN (prosecco)
Ailo's 50th anniversary team:
Madeleine Leone, Claire Conway, Assunta Crespi,
Khoji Khosropana, Alessandro Piccardi, Judi Roselli - Cecconi

Maude Jacopozzi - AILO's first president

AILO's PAST and PRESENT PRESIDENTS

1974-76 Maude Jacopozzi
1976-78 Elizabeth Sherman
1978-80 Helen Millman
1980-82 Ellie Nocentini
1982-84 Anne Sbolci
1984-86 Carol Cuomo
1986-88 Kathleen Chiarlone
1988-90 Veronica Zanardi
1990-92 Joan Barsotti
1992-94 Jenny Sestini
1994-96 Barbara Maraventano
1996-98 Betty Schlerman
1998-00 Gretchen Guidi
2000-02 Shiva Saadat
2002-04 Madeleine Leone
2004-06 Luciana Fava Giles
2006-08 Susan Stearn
2008-10 Maria Teresa Medri
2010-12 Linda Close
2012-14 Sylvia Behrman
2014-15 Blandina Steinhauslin
2015-17 Jocelyn Fitzgerald
2017-19 Judi Roselli-Cecconi
2019-21 Kimberly Breeze
2022-24 Bergljot Leifsdottir
2024-26 Judi Roselli-Cecconi

AILO's LIFE MEMBERS

Over the years, AILO has awarded 14 Life Memberships to women whose faithfulness and tireless dedication to the Club and its work have been acknowledged with this special recognition.

The Evolution of the Constitution

AILO became a registered *Non-profit Organization of Social Utility Organization*-ONLUS in 1990. Since that time, AILO has performed its duties as an official charitable organization, respecting the necessary requirements declared in its objectives and mission. In the following years, numerous Italian associations were established as ONLUS organizations.

The AILO Constitution sets out the legal structure and the responsibilities of the organization. It outlines the goals and activities, the regulations for membership, the Board, the meetings, the elections and the management of the financial aspects, as well as the rights and obligations of the members.

FAWCO... *AILO's opportunity to reach out beyond Italy*

Since 1977, AILO has the privilege of being a member of FAWCO, FEDERATION OF AMERICAN WOMEN'S CLUBS OVERSEAS.

Founded in 1931, FAWCO is an international, non-partisan network of independent, non-profit, women's clubs and associations throughout the world, stretching across six continents, from Norway to Kenya, and from Columbia to Australia. The issues that led to its creation continue to be addressed through FAWCO's activities as a UN-accredited NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) since 1995, and it has held special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1997. FAWCO continues to work with its four pillars of Member Club Support, Philanthropy, US Issues and Global Issues. The areas of advocacy in global issues are education, the environment, health, and human rights. There are currently 59 clubs in 29 countries. These are divided up into 10 regions. Six of these are Italian clubs, including AILO.

As a recognized global women's NGO, the Federation aims to serve as a resource and a voice for its members through whom it seeks to:

- ► promote the improvement in the lives of women and girls worldwide, especially in the areas of human rights, health, education, and the environment.
- ► advocate for the rights of U.S. citizens overseas.
- ► contribute to peace within the global community through its teams and the FAWCO Foundation.

The Foundation awards yearly grants aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in the areas as above: **education, environment, health, and human rights.**

AILO and FAWCO

FAWCO is the "umbrella" organization merging AILO and the other individual clubs into a united entity. FAWCO membership allows AILO to be part of a worldwide charity group and reach out beyond Italy to promote health and well-being in low resource countries.

It is important to know that **every member of AILO automatically becomes a FAWCO member too.** She can participate in all its events, use their online services, access their publications, and run for positions within the organization.

AILO has a *FAWCO representative* who holds the *Board Chair* position. She works as a liaison between the two organizations and the other FAWCO member clubs. During the two years in office, she works to inform AILO members of the values and benefits of the affiliation with FAWCO and to promote interest, participation and fundraising within the AILO membership for the benefit of FAWCO projects. Together with the president, she attends the FAWCO conferences on AILO's behalf. Individual members are encouraged to participate as well. Each year, members are

encouraged to present proposals for grants, many of which have been accepted in the past. In fact, AILO has won several Development Grants for humanitarian projects located in various parts of the world.

In 2021, for instance, AILO won the FAWCO Pam Dahlgren Educating Africa Children Development Grant which is specifically Africa-focused nominated projects. AILO's project, nominated was called **Feeding Our School Children** went to the Ursuline convent school in Antsiranana/Diego Suarez, a poverty-stricken area in Madagascar. Most of the 150 pupils are poor so the idea is to start a breakfast club to give those children who come to school on an empty stomach some sustenance to start the day to stop lethargy and lack of concentration affecting their studies. The project also provided some supplementary nourishing food to take home at the end of the school day. This meant that the children had something to eat before bedtime and gave them the possibility of sharing this with their siblings.

And, more Recently, in 2023, at the FAWCO Biennial Conference in Bratislava, AILO was again awarded a Development Grant, this time for **Beacon of Hope** project of the Ursuline Nuns hospital' which was built and donated by the Italian Association Chirurgia Pediatrica Solidale ODV of Trento. This hospital in Madagascar accepts everyone in need of health care for the many diseases present there, like malaria. The money was earmarked for buying medicines.

Through personal donations and various fundraising events, including the Ragtime Ball, the Bollywood dinner, and the Masked Ball dinner dance, held at St. James Church, AILO managed to purchase more than 38 family and community wells. In fact, in 2014, AILO was awarded the *platinum medal* for the FAWCO WELLS FOR CLEAN WATER TARGET PROJECT.

In February 2010, AILO had the pleasure of hosting the FAWCO Regional Meeting in Florence with participants from Belgium, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Switzerland, and USA.

AILO members also collaborated in making quilted squares for the FAWCO Foundation’s yearly fundraiser *FRIENDSHIP QUILT* which was auctioned at the annual conference.

A recent weekly activity was AILO’s adhesion to the FAWCO initiative *CLUBS IN MOTION* comprising simple group walks around beautiful Florence and its surroundings in support of the physical and mental health of members… and their dogs.

An AILO member has acted as the regional coordinator for FAWCO and another as Co-chair of the Health Team coordinating information for FAWCO members on health topics of general interest and, in particular, on women’s health, and yet another as Co-chair of the FAWCO Environmental team.

Every year the FAWCO Foundation gives members of all FAWCO and FAUSA clubs and their children, the opportunity to apply for an Award to further or continue their education or for other specific projects. Over the years, AILO is proud that 4 of its members have been awarded **FAWCO Foundation Awards** in different categories: the 2nd Achievement Award in 1993, the Ruth St. John Federation Award in 1999, the Arts Award (conferred on a member's daughter) in 2006 and the FAUSA *(see below)* Skills Enhancement Award in 2015.

Another important achievement was in **2017** receiving FAWCO's Target Medallion Gold Donor Award in recognition of the contribution of $1,947 AILO raised for the **Hope Beyond Displacement** target project which paid for schooling for 290 girls and professional training and awareness programs for 50 women.

In 2018, AILO's efforts focused on gathering funds for the Human Rights Developmental Grant **Breaking the Cycle**, for which it received a Certificate of Appreciation.
In the same year, it won the two Health Development Grants from the FAWCO Foundation for the projects presented by two members: Ending TB - Pyongsong Sanitorium, North Korea and Project WIN - Chiang Mai, Thailand. Members also participated in the FAWCO *Cruise for a Cause*, the fundraising holiday around the Mediterranean Sea.
The **2020 to 2022** FAWCO Project was **Promoting Well-Being and Healthy Lives for Women and Girls**. Through the S.A.F.E. (Safe Alternatives for Female Genital Mutilation Elimination), the aim was to provide in the Mara region of Tanzania with safe havens for 500 at-risk girls coupled with family counseling services to ensure their safe return home, free from the threat of female genital mutilation (FGM); to give healthcare and psychosocial counseling to 200 women and 300 girl survivors of FGM; to increase community sensitization through outreach programs and introduction of Alternative Rites of Passage as an alternative to FGM, with a potential reach of 25,000 individuals; to foster income-generating opportunities for 50 women and 50 girls and to give access to the National Health Insurance Fund plan.
The **2023 to 2025** FAWCO Project is entitled **Awesome Blossoms** and was proposed by the Safe Space community-based organization, created by Mrs. Peninah Nthenya Musyimi. This project features organic, water-efficient urban farms with 500 gardens in each farm to support girls' education and empowerment programs and with 75 women in partnership with three primary schools located in the Mathare slum area of Nairobi. The farms involve an ingenious vertical hydroponic food system which is compact and produces consistent yields. Systematic use of organic foliar biopesticides and fungicides reduces the risk of exposure to synthetic chemicals, which contribute significantly to environmental pollution. The project is aimed at positively impacting the entire community by improving access to healthy food options. Women and girls in the program would develop valuable skills in organic hydroponic farming, gain nutritional advice through specific workshops, and increase economic empowerment by learning and managing the various steps – from production to delivery – of this aspect of agribusiness.

FAWCO Interim Conference - March 15th to 17th 2024, Porto, Portugal

AILO had a large delegation at the 2024 FAWCO Interim Conference, there were five of us, the President, the FAWCO representative, the FAWCO international representative, the Vice President) and the Secretary.

The conference was very interesting as always and a great way to connect with other clubs and the rest of the world. The newest project unveiled at the conference was 'Literacy is our Legacy', an invitation to all writers in FAWCO to meet up and continue the conversation on books and the future of libraries.

The FAWCO international representative as co-chair of the Environment Team gave a presentation on Foraging with her co-chair from the Paris club. It was enjoyed by a large audience of FAWCO club members.

The Foundation Night had a Fairytale theme, and we were encouraged to dress up as a character from a favorite fairytale, this was fun and we became Cruella, Pippi Longstocking, and The Magic Carpet.

The highlight of the conference for AILO was winning the Global Issues Development Grant for Nosotras, Generation Z, a project designed to help youngsters arriving in Florence to integrate with the local community and schools through counselling and therapy, a project which can include AILO's community service as there will be opportunities to socialize and meet the young people, their parents and educators.

A successful and enjoyable conference in beautiful Porto.

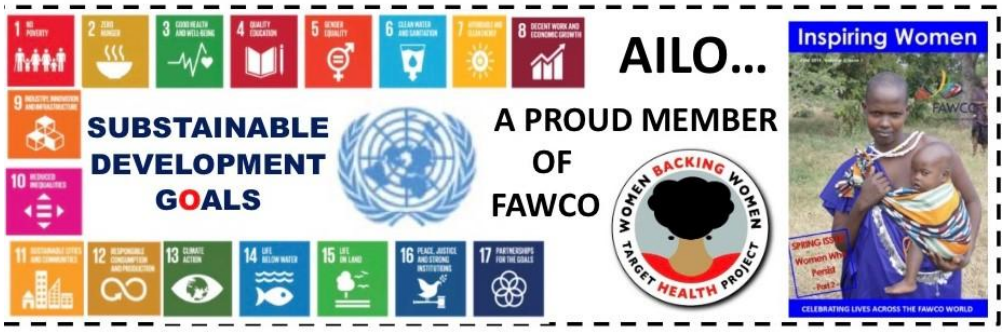
FAWCO Biannual Conference - March 26th to 30th 2025, Annapolis USA

Due to the distance and costs involved, AILO did not attend this Conference, but it will continue to participate in the regional meeting (Region 8 - Greece, Italy, Malta) that takes place every year.

FAWCO ONLINE The organization has many worthwhile online **publications**, the most important of which include *The Forum*, *Connections (*a quarterly E-letter) and *News in Brief,* a very interesting, monthly E-Newsletter*.*
The magazine *Inspiring Women* (see AILO's Facebook page) profiles the lives of FAWCO members throughout the world, who have used their skills and talents to make an impact in the global community. Several AILO members have been interviewed for this publication.
All the above are available by subscribing through the FWACO website *www.fawco.org*
FAWCO is also on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

Besides FAWCO and the FAWCO Foundation, there is a third club, **FAWCO Alumnae USA** – **FAUSA**, (https://fausa.org), officially integrated into the FAWCO Federation in 2003. This will be of interest to AILO members returning to live in the United States.

Also of interest to AILO's American members is to know that FAWCO has a **U.S. Liaison** (usliaison@fawco.org) to support Americans living overseas and provide information on important issues on their rights and responsibilities including citizenship, voting, taxation and banking concerns.



AILO ORGANIZATION AND MEMBERSHIP

The **ORGANIZATION of AILO** is regulated by its Constitution, which sets out the goals, the governance, and the membership guidelines. Members are divided into Ordinary Members and Honorary Life Members: the latter title is awarded by the Board in recognition of exceptional service to AILO. The members' rights and responsibilities include electing the associative bodies, being eligible for elective office, being informed and approving AILO's projects and financial statements, as well as contributing to its development.

The Association is administered by an *Executive Board* which is elected for a two-year term by all members at a General Meeting. The Board is composed of the president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, parliamentarian, and the Chairs of the Standing Committees: community service, cultural program, donation research, FAWCO, membership, neighborhoods, newsletter-website and social media, night owl, and social. Each of the chairs may appoint a vice chair. Only half the board members are renewed each year to guarantee the carry-over of the activities in progress and to have experienced members supporting the new entries. Board chairs are invited to give a short report at all General Meetings, their prospective plan of action and, at the end of their mandate, to make their recommendations. Upon completion of his/her term of office, the president becomes a counselor.

The role of the Parliamentarian is to advise on parliamentary procedures to help maintain order and fairness during AILO's General and Board meetings. The Parliamentarian is required to have a working knowledge of parliamentary procedures or an interest in developing the necessary expertise. Therefore, the Parliamentarian ensures that there are adherence and observance of parliamentary procedures at official meetings.

At the beginning of each year, a Nominating Committee seeks nominations for the positions being renewed for the new Board members who will take office from July 1st, the beginning of the AILO year. All members are invited to take a turn and rotate around the various Board positions.

MEMBERSHIP

Who are the members of AILO?

AILO members consist of women and men from many different countries connected to the city and province of Florence. They are united by their interest in contributing to fundraising activities and local volunteer community services and in getting to know people and cultures from different parts of the world. They have a mutual knowledge of English which is the language used at meetings, events and for publications. They are inspired by the common *Spirit of Giving* to the community and to AILO.

They also have an interest in the many social events and cultural activities that AILO offers, including the talks on different subjects both at the General Meetings, held usually on the first Tuesday of the month, and at the evening Night Owl gatherings, an excellent way for members unable to be in the morning meetings to participate and keep in touch.

The *Membership Chair* organizes annual renewals and processes the new membership applications, informing new members of their acceptance. She keeps a register of the new members' interests in the different AILO activities and their professional talents, as expressed in their application forms. She prepares and replaces badges (with personalized flags relating to their countries of origin) for new and current members and keeps an accurate, updated list of the members' names and addresses, liaising with the Newsletter and Neighborhood Chairs. She produces and distributes the annual Members' Directory and organizes at least two new member welcome events per year.

AILO is proud of its multicultural membership. In fact, the *membership numbers and nationalities*

recorded in the last booklet in 2010 were 200 members with 50% American, 20% Italian and 30% other nationalities. In 2025, AILO had members from Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, New Zealand, Taiwan, UK, and the USA. Because the ex-pat community in Florence is fluid with people arriving in the city to stay for varying lengths of time, AILO has in past years also had members from Myanmar, China, Denmark, Egypt, India, Scandinavia, Serbia, Spain, Turkey and Switzerland. Many members have more than one citizenship. The new percentages as of 2025 have varied throughout the years, with an increase in the number of Italians, but similar to the tendencies seen in other associations today, there has been a reduction in membership. Another difference of note, compared to the past, is that nowadays more AILO women are working professionals.

How to become a member

All individuals who share AILO's objectives and are willing to participate actively in AILO's activities and projects with their efforts, skills, and knowledge and who have a basic command of the English language have the principal requisites for membership.

Anyone interested in becoming a member is welcome to come to one of the General Meetings, held from October to June, to get an idea of the working atmosphere of the group and to obtain information and an application form available from the Membership chair. Information can also be found on the website **https://ailo-florence.org** from which the application form can also be downloaded.

Each application, signed by two sponsoring members, is submitted to the Board for approval. New Membership is then confirmed on receipt of the yearly dues and membership is confirmed each year on the payment of the annual dues by October. Members living outside of the country can pay their dues and retain membership on the same conditions. All members are expected to understand and to comply with the present AILO's Constitution, Standing Rules and By Laws of the Association. They are encouraged to take part in all the activities and to become Board members when Board elections are scheduled.

Membership offers…

annual membership directory – monthly meetings with a guest speaker - monthly newsletter - opportunities for community service - local neighborhood support groups - website - social functions - cultural visits and day trips – much more

ANNUAL BAZAAR

A special event with a special place in the heart of the American-International League.

The **Annual Bazaar** is the central part of AILO's fundraising and charity donation activities, allowing it to fulfil its main purpose of supporting those who need help in a concrete way. It is usually held during the Christmas period to add a unique festive buzz and "specialty" offerings to

the event. The Bazaar, as this indoor market is called, is a very gratifying opportunity to do good and it is a perfect occasion for all the members to work together, in solidarity and friendship.
For many, both the months of preparation and the days themselves of the sale are the most rewarding experiences of the AILO year. The desire to do useful work and donate to charity are universal sentiments and it is natural for expats to feel the desire to contribute in this way to their new home environment. These were amongst the motivations for the first American ladies – and one gentleman – to create the American- International League in 1975. From its earliest days, and for many years, this annual fundraising Bazaar was held traditionally on the 8th of December, the Festa dell'Immacolata and an Italian public holiday. Members got into the habit of organizing their annual vacations and trips to visit families and friends around the event, to be sure to be in Florence for the occasion.

Bazaars have a long history in America. From the earliest days, American churches, clubs, school groups, associations and charities have held bazaars at all times of the year to raise money for their activities. A small coffee and cake table in a church basement after services or refreshments in the school gym on open house night will ask for a contribution to some part of the necessary supplies or to fund repairs. Whereas, in Italy, there is the tradition of the wonderful, commercial street markets, but markets as fundraising opportunities for charity were quite unknown until recently. That is why the Christmas Bazaar of the American International League was such a novelty and great success starting from the '70s and '80s. It was an unmissable appointment on the yearly calendar of many Florentines, a reputation and popularity that it still maintains today.

Over the years, the AILO Bazaar has been held in several different venues. At the beginning, it took place in the undercroft of the St. James American Church and then at the Hotel Park Palace until 2000, then for the three years between 2001 and 2003, at the *Santa Caterina* Church in

Coverciano. From 2004 up to 2015, the location was at the historic *Paglieri* (ex-hay barn), associated with the former *Scuderie Reali* (royal stables) near Porta Romana, offered free of rent by the Soprintendenza ai Beni Culturali of Florence. In 2016 and 2017 it was held in the *Convitto della Calza* in Via Romana. Each venue provided its own special ambiance and individual contribution to the festive season event. Since 2018, AILO was privileged to use Roster's beautiful Tepidarium, in the heart of the spacious *Giardino di Orticultura*, offered once again rent free, this time by the city of Florence. Built in 1880, this magnificent, glass and metal, heated greenhouse – known as the "Crystal Palace" - is a liberty style, architectural jewel, adding history, art, and a touch of exotic fascination to the atmosphere of the Bazaar. In 2025, the Christmas Bazaar will be changing venue to the Visarno Racetrack in Florence's Cascine Park, with a new date: November 21, 22, 23. A special race on Friday the 21st will be dedicated in honor of AILO.

From the first months of every year, the planning, publicizing, coordinating, and working for the next AILO Bazaar fill many hours and days to assure that it will be a success. Most of the members participate in some way to provide support for this essential project. Recruiting goes on all year with sign-up sheets at the General Meetings. Members talk and laugh and share their experiences from past bazaars and the changes they will make to the next one. Investigating different ways to mix and present the merchandise and other new ideas for the next year make the whole process a work in progress. In that regard, feedback meetings, and informal surveys of Booth chairs and helpers after each Bazaar provide information on the positive aspects and needs for improvement that are then used as building blocks for the next Bazaar.

Everything sold at the Bazaar has been made, donated, or collected by AILO members. Individual members knit, crochet, and sew handmade items, as well as organizing group craft sessions. They collect all types of quality, new and used household objects, toys, books, clothes, and accessories. donated mainly by private individuals (family, friends, and acquaintances). The items are sorted, freshened up and then stored in members' homes or at other locations until the Bazaar.

With the support of an official letter explaining AILO and the event, members also seek donations from local businesses, shops, restaurants, travel agents, etc. in and around the city, all to provide merchandise for the Bazaar. These are often the sources of the exciting lottery and in the past, silent auction prizes.

The AILO *Bazaar Chair* runs the bazaar and works the whole year round, together with the team of the individual *Booth Chairs.* It is a big responsibility, but the reward at the end is enormous. It needs an ability to peruse the whole spectacle and to understand the energy that the event requires and produces as so many women work hard to make money to donate to the chosen charities.

Many months before the event, plans for the Bazaar Day itself are also underway: posters and pamphlets are printed out to be distributed around the city, press conferences and news articles are organized to publicize the Bazaar, the plan of the spaces available in the venue is allocated to the various booths and the collection and transport of the Bazaar wares are booked. Many members prepare to work in a booth with friends they have known for many years. Others volunteer for new experiences with fresh acquaintances. People who had presided over a booth for years give way to new members.

THE BAZAAR BOOTHS AND CREWS

Accessories… *designer items and good quality bags, purses, belts, gloves, scarves, etc.*

AILO Info… a *welcoming crew greets new arrivals, hands out AILO pamphlets and presents posters displaying previous charity donations and new projects of volunteer associations to fund or assist the Bazaar proceedings.*

Baked goods… d*ue to recent changes in the Italian law regarding the sale of food stuffs, AILO is now only able to sell its famous packaged AILO brownies.*

Books … *a great selection of used hard/soft covered books, in good condition, both in English and Italian as well as a small number of books in French and German, with good prices for fiction and non-fiction classics and recent bestsellers; coffee table books (a little more expensive).*

Clothing… *beautiful, good quality, new and vintage clothing: coats, dresses, skirts, shirts, pants, both formal and informal, all elegant - for men and women - lots of choice. - a real favorite - REAL bargains***.**

Xmas & Handmade… *a delightful assortment of items, mostly hand-made by members: Christmas decorations, wreaths, nativity scenes, candles, tableware, children's, and babies' clothing.*

Food and beverages… *snacks and lunch dishes, mulled wine and drinks for the Bazaar workers and clients.*

Kids' corner … *an area to play and clown about, do face painting and have a visit with Santa Claus, the American Babbo Natale. In the past, other non-profit organizations have helped us like Soccorso Clown which sent clowns to entertain the children (and adults).*

Jewelry… *two very popular booths, one of a collection of precious vintage jewelry and the other with mixed costume jewelry items, interesting earrings, necklaces, and bracelets.*

Lottery… *a chance to win fabulous prizes which vary each year: these may be gourmet food and wine baskets, a new Smartphone, electronic gadgets, shopping, restaurant and supermarket vouchers, designer leather goods, special jewelry, paintings.*

Silent Auction… *On occasions which a Silent Auction is held, precious items go to the highest bidder: famous designer goods, important wine, tours, vacations in agritourisms, dinners in restaurants. Many items to choose from, different each year.*

Toys… *for children of all ages and vintage toys for collectors, books for kids and teenagers.*

White Elephant…*interesting and unusual household goods, decorations, kitchenware, lots of hidden treasures.*

CREWS: Publicity/Public Relations – Decorations – Animation - Photographers - Set up/Clean up.

In the past, the Bazaar included American style food and drinks, as well as home-made specialties. Currently, due to changes in Italian health and hygiene safety and security regulations, only officially registered caterers can prepare and serve the food products and beverages for patrons. But, the choice of the food menu is proposed by AILO, with the intention of maintaining ethnic flavors with typically American and international dishes, like brownies and mulled wine.

The patrons, most of whom are regulars, are a very special group of people, made up of many Florentines and all the various nationalities of the AILO community. They become permanent supporters of AILO not only by their presence, but also with the joy and enthusiasm they bring along every year. They adapt to the changes of venue and move happily from one booth to the next, appreciating the different merchandise and offerings of each one. The crowd lining up on opening day is a delight to see. Many come early to get the wonderful bargains they know are awaiting them each year… and they are never disappointed. Younger regulars often help out as volunteer staff on the different booths.

Everyone brings along their children, grandchildren, other family members and friends of all ages. There is, in fact, something of interest and enjoyment for every age group. New, and ever-increasing, additions to the crowd are the volunteers (and their family and friends) from the other charity associations in Florence as well as students from some of the international

schools in the city with whom AILO is establishing a tight knit network of mutual support. They support AILO on the booths, with their presence and by shopping.

After the Bazaars, it is customary to hold a **Bazaar Volunteers lunch**, for example, after the **2024 Bazaar** at St James church. It was prepared by other volunteer AILO members. The Booth chaired invite the members and friends who had helped on their booths and those who also help for set-up and clean-up, decorating the Tepidarium, security, and other positions. It is AILO's way of recognizing those people who actively participate in the success of the Bazaar and to thank them warmly.

Another important novelty was introduced after the **2024 Bazaar.** Because the *Clothing Booth Chairs* booth had collected so many quality items, some of which were not sold at the Bazaar, they decided to hold **POP-UP SHOP** sales to augment the earnings from their booth which are already quite substantial each year. One of these, for example, was held at the home of one of *Clothing Booth Co-Chairs*, in San Casciano, with the assistance of the other *Clothing Booth Chair,* and another at Il Conventino between **February and March 2025**. Both venues for the sales were donated and it is hoped, in the future, to continue these new ventures.

CHARITY RESEARCH AND DONATIONS. ***The rewarding satisfaction of supporting charity organizations with the proceeds from the Bazaar***	

AILO's **CHARITY RESEARCH and DONATIONS** section represents the major, concrete realization of AILO's *raison d'etre:* to serve the community and contribute to social assistance programs through charities based within the city and province of Florence. It represents AILO's biggest annual financial and administrative enterprise, in association with the Annual Bazaar, the grand fundraising event, the proceeds of which go to the benefit of these charities. Both activities involve all the membership up front. First, the members work hard to raise money through the Bazaar and then they participate in the process of deciding to whom and for what the funds will be distributed. In the last 50 years, AILO has donated to more than 800 charities in Florence and its province.

The *Donation process* itself is quite articulate and is structured to guarantee transparency, democracy, and fairness. Each year, all members are invited to propose charities to donate to. They are permitted to request funding for only one organization at a time, and they need to be familiar with the work it does. Charities which receive little or no government or corporate funding are preferred, favoring the smaller, struggling groups which do hands-on work. They also need to be a registered, non-profit association, located in Florence and its province. The proposals for donation sponsorship are not generic but must be specific amounts of money for precisely defined

projects that can be realized in the short term, more or less with the funds offered by AILO. Members are encouraged to interact with the people of the charities they are looking to fund and investigate and understand the type of work they do.

The *Donation Research Chair* and appointed *team* are in charge of handling the donation process, which includes verifying the applications for a donation presented by the members, establishing a relationship with the charity, and activating the follow up on the project after the funds have been donated. It is of the utmost importance that they do a thorough job in finding out as much as possible about each organization and the specific project proposed. In short, they have the responsibility of guaranteeing that AILO's precious and hard-earned, fund-raised money is spent well. It is one of the most rewarding positions on the AILO Board and all members are encouraged to have a turn on the team. The experience allows the group to get to know the charities, each special in its own way in the valuable work they do for Florence. It is also a great opportunity to actively integrate into this fascinating component of the Italian community and to learn about another very worthwhile side of the city we live in and love.

AILO's *yearly calendar* structures the requirements and timing of the donation process. The Donation Application Form acts as a guideline to the information the proposing member needs to know and provide. It is distributed at the June General Meeting (also available on the website) and needs to be submitted after the summer, in time to meet the deadline decided on by the Donation Research Chair.

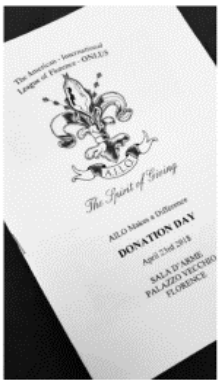
After collecting the applications, the Donation Research team gets to work, reviewing each one to confirm that it complies with the sponsorship requirements. To aid with this, an official questionnaire is sent out to each charity, enquiring about their organization, the number of volunteers, other sources of their funding and so on. The charities are then visited in person by a team member, preferably with the sponsor. This is when the charity and their work can be investigated thoroughly and approved as an official candidate for an AILO donation.

Once the candidate list has been confirmed, the sponsor member presents a brief description of the charity and project she is supporting at the General Meetings before the Christmas break. These outlines are also printed in the Newsletter, with the aim of helping members to understand the different proposals and so orientate their choices. In the meantime, the *Treasurer chair* works on the financial "ins and outs" of the Bazaar proceeds and calculates the amount available for donations. On average, there is enough to fund up to ten projects. The Ballot to vote on the charities is usually held at a General Meeting in the early New Year and the results are announced immediately. As seen in the "Selection of AILO's Donation Achievements" table, charities helping women, children and the elderly are popular and projects concerning specific illnesses and disabilities are also common. There is sometimes an animal shelter on the list.

Once the results are official, the charities selected can be advised that their project has been approved and their bank details are requested for the transfer of funds. The follow-up work through the year is equally important in order to receive confirmation that the project has been accomplished and that the funding has been used appropriately.

The American Consul General, in his/her role as AILO's Honorary President is also usually present at the Ceremony for Donation Day.

Over the years, one of the aims of Donation Research has become to connect to these passionate, life-changing organizations and initiate a friendship and collaboration to order to share mutual experiences of fundraising and social activities. Volunteers of the various charities are now being invited to help out at the Bazaar, an occasion for them to have visibility when they appear wearing their badges and uniforms. Their brochures are also displayed on the AILO information table. Those who work on the stalls are very enthusiastic, saying it is a good way to get a better understanding of what AILO does and what it stands for.



Donation Day is held in either March or April in one of the ceremonial halls of Palazzo Vecchio. It is there that the various chosen charities give a presentation on their work and the project being funded. They are always thrilled to be recognised for their contributions to the community, as well as to receive the money to cover their project which gives them the chance to improve their services and introduce new initiatives into their organizations. It is a very festive occasion, in the presence of official representatives from the administration of the city, and light refreshments and a celebrative *brindisi* are shared and enjoyed.

Another important consequence of the acquaintance with other volunteer groups in Florence is that it can be a practical way of discovering new opportunities to help others and enhance AILO's Community Service activities. The end result is the *network of solidarity* being built amongst associations in Florence, where AILO is becoming a point of reference for many.

"A Small Selection of AILO's Donation Achievements"

2012 P.A.M.A.P.I.
Rehab center and day care for severely autistic young adults.
The construction of a greenhouse to give the young people a new activity to improve their condition.

2015 A.T.C.R.U.P.
Association for the treatment and rehabilitation of pediatric burns.
AILO provided a lipofilling device which has very encouraging results to limit the physical and psychological effects of permanent scarring in the children treated.

2015 OPERA SAN PROCOLO
Provides the opportunity of a summer holiday for those who could not otherwise afford it, in a home rented from the Forestale. Benefiting children, families and the elderly, the holiday home is run by volunteers.
AILO funded a new washing and drying machine.

2016 PROGETTO VILLA LORENZI
The villa is a day center for children and adolescents coming from difficult and abusive home situations.
AILO funding was given for the materials used for bookbinding, carpentry, and artisan workshops

to improve their self-esteem.

2017 ASSOCIAZIONE BANCO AMLIMENTARE DELLA TOSCANA
Collects and redistributes food that would otherwise be wasted and ensures that it is given to the poor and homeless in Florence through the appropriate organizations.
AILO funding was used to purchase an industrial cleaner for their new warehouse in Novoli.

2018 RONDA DELLA CARITA' E DELLA SOLIDARIETA'
Feeding and comforting the homeless at the station in Florence.
AILO funding was given for the purchase of an APE to bring leftover canteen food from the university.

2019 CARITAS Mensa di Via Baracca
This is the canteen where AILO volunteers worked at the time twice a month. On average 400 to 450 people were served a very good lunch every day.
AILO's contribution went towards the replacement of a professional deep fryer in the kitchen.

2000 CERCHIO BLU - NUCLEO PROTEZIONE CIVILE DEL COMUNE DI FIRENZE
A volunteer organization of Psychologists and Psychiatrists who are called out to dangerous or potentially traumatic situations like earthquakes to give a professional Emergency Psychological Assistance to the people involved. They also help in crowd management.
AILO funding was used to purchase a Master tent, a generator, a table and 4 chairs for an in-the-field emergency help station.

2021 ANGELI DELLA CITTA'
This association provides food and help for families in poverty and help for the homeless. Their project provided food vouchers to be given to families in dire need. They also want to provide personal cleaning articles to the homeless. They
are in the Santo Spirito area and give out food and clean used clothing every week to the poorest families in the area.

2022 ASSOCIAZIONE PANTAGRUEL ASSISTING THE INMATES OF SOLLICIANO PRISON
The spectacles project provided toiletries, new underwear, and phone cards to help those inmates who are unable to purchase these from the prison store.

2023 IL PANE QUOTIDIANO
This organization helps poor families/people in difficulty, providing vouchers to buy food, and delivering food to those who cannot come out. The money was used for food, vouchers, and anything necessary to alleviate the poverty of these people.

NUOVA AURORA
An association which helps mentally challenged children and young adults with activities that are considered therapeutic. Project Art Therapy, materials, and instruction.

2024 RSA IL GIGNORO
AILO funding was given to the care home for the elderly to buy a LIM, an interactive multimedia board 'Monitor Smart' to help small groups of elderly people to improve cognitive skills

stimulating their brain with easy interactive exercises, the use of an easel is vital to include those people who cannot stand.

MISERICORDIA 'ANTELLA'
AILO funding was given to this association to buy a DAE Automatic Defibrillator.

COMUNITY SERVICE

AILO's **Community Service** is the tangible and dynamic heart of the *"in person"* realization of promoting of friendship and well-being within the local communities. The work consists in organizing and participating in practical volunteer activities and socially useful projects at various institutions and outdoor environments within the city and province of Florence. Over the years, these have included residences for senior citizens and persons with disabilities, institutions, and shelters for the homeless and people in need, food drives, health service care and public gardens.

The *Community Service Chair* liaisons with the managers of the structures, coordinates the rosters for the members' participation and gathers and investigates new proposals as they emerge from the members' everyday interactions and experiences within the city.
AILO's Community Service activities vary over time, but some become a long-term passion and deserve a special mention. These include:

■ **The Iris Garden Service... *an AILO favorite***

The amazing Iris - a word of Greek origin meaning rainbow - is not only the symbol of Florence since 1251, but also, the flower chosen as AILO's logo in 1975, in honor of its host city

The ***Iris Garden*** is a highlight of the beauties of Florence. It was created in 1954 to provide an adequate setting for the *"Premio Firenze",* the first edition of the International Iris Competition. The City Councilor for Fine Arts and Gardens at the time recognized the importance of the project and obtained the City's permission to create the permanent and world-unique Iris Garden on the eastern side of Piazzale Michelangelo with a magnificent view of the town. It was inaugurated in 1957, as was the *Italian Iris Society,* which was founded for its management. Many foreign cultivators have donated irises over the years and the addition of a pond in 1967 made an ideal site for particular iris varieties from Japan and Louisiana. The Iris Garden is open to the public every year from April 25 to May 20.

Since 2014, AILO has been collaborating with the maintenance and development of the garden, including doing gardening chores, welcoming visitors on open days and participating in the garden's events. A team of enthusiastic members work with other volunteers from the *Angeli del Bello* Foundation and attend weekly to clear the flower beds of weeds and debris, renew nametags on the plants, and help with general upkeep. Two AILO members have become distinguished judges of the Iris flower show and other members are interested in studying for their certificates.
A plaque was placed in the Iris garden in 2018 to celebrate its special relationship with AILO.

■ **The Caritas "Baracca" Soup Kitchen Service*... a special and rewarding experience***

Caritas Italiana is the pastoral organization of the Italian Episcopal Conference, which is dedicated to the promotion of charity. It was founded in 1971 by Pope Paul VI, and its prevalently pedagogical role promotes the growth of a Christian sense of solidarity within families and the community. There is a network of around 200 Italian diocesan Caritas organizations, coordinating

various types of concrete social actions and support services for those in need. The *Fondazione Solidarietà Caritas Firenze* runs many services in Florence, including several soup kitchens.

For several years, AILO collaborated with the Caritas canteen located in the Via Baracca, a hub for the collection, preparation and consignment of food and other goods to other canteens and charity organizations which distribute meals all over Florence for over six years. A large quantity of the food was donated by big supermarkets. Around 2000 meals were made each day, 350-400 of which were served directly at the Baracca location. They also ran a special, on-site storage area where homeless people could keep a suitcase with their important possessions and documents in safety.

AILO members took part in the service usually twice a month, helping to cut up the vegetables and fruit which were prepared for the meals distributed in the various canteens and then to serve the delicious, hearty three course hot lunches to the registered Baracca regulars who came to eat each day. The people coming in for a meal ranged from the elderly to younger men and women (Italians and migrants) and a few children with their parents. There were about 6 chefs, helped by a shift of 7 volunteers who varied each day. All volunteers were invited to share a late lunch with the kitchen and administration staff, after the serving and the dining areas had been cleaned and tidied. The members were always touched by the caring, respectful and light-hearted atmosphere there, as well as the calm and competent management of the everyday ups and downs. AILO tried to maintain its commitment twelve months a year, even at Christmas and New Year. Members took part in the HACCP training course in food hygiene and safety to comply with the European regulation for those working with food for the public.

In 2019, AILO was proud to donate a badly needed, professional deep fryer for the kitchen, using funds raised at the Christmas Bazaar.

Inspired by the original Pennsylvanian *Chase the Chill* project of "Scarves and Gloves on Trees for those in need," AILO started a Scarf Knitting Program within the membership in 2018. This resulted in almost 200 hand-knitted scarves being given out to the "regulars" of the Baracca Soup Kitchen.

■ The Senior Citizen Retirement and Disabled People's Homes Service…*enjoyment for all*

AILO is involved in creative and ongoing initiatives in different senior citizen and disabled people's homes within the Florentine community. Members take part in a variety of activities, which include very popular piano and singing concerts and theatrical performances of AVO (Hospital Volunteer Association) to the joy, laughter, and the active participation of the residents themselves. Other initiatives include morning coffee with seniors with Alzheimer, afternoon teas with home-made cakes and reading, playing games, chatting, and listening to residents and occasionally bringing along pet dogs to keep residents amused.

Since 2018, AILO takes part in the "*Yarn Bombing" Knitting Project* at a senior citizens' home. With the help of AILO members and some relatives, residents and day attendants knit, crochet, and sew the brightly colored pieces used to decorate trees, statues, poles, and benches in the garden.

More of AILO's valued Community Solidarity Interests are listed below.

► **Food Bank collection**: *collection of items on the Food Donation Days at local supermarkets and other food stores on behalf of the Associazione Banco Alimentare della Toscana ODV (Tuscan Food Bank Association ODV) which supports the distribution to those who live in food poverty.*

► ***Corri La Vita***: *support to the* annual **"***RUN LIFE" Project, a recreational run for all takers, to raise awareness and funds for the treatment and research in breast cancer.*

► **Heart Pillow project**: *distribution of ♥ pillows to women who have undergone breast cancer surgery.*

► **"*Angeli del Bello* Foundation of Florence**: *AILO members join volunteers of the* "Angels of Beauty" *Foundation in the maintenance of decorum and cleanliness of the streets, monuments, and parks of the city.*

► **Ragazzi di Sipario Bistro Luncheons:** *in support of the disabled young adults' social cooperative*

which runs the restaurant.

► **Kids' Social Events**: *parties and fun in institutions for underprivileged youngsters*.

► **Learning-to-love-English classes**: *conversation and singing with small children and lessons for young teenagers in local pre-school and school environments.*

"You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give"

Attributed to Winston Churchill

NEIGHBORHOOD… ***Friendship and support close to home.***

In the early days of AILO, when the membership started to expand, the Board came up with the **Neighborhood** scheme, a system of dividing the members into smaller, local groups according to the different zones of the city and outskirts of Florence where they lived. The idea was to enable the members to get to know each other as neighbors and to be on hand for each other in case of need (a "buddy care" network). It was based on the belief that it is hard to socialize in a large group, as are the general meetings, when so much attention and time go to the many business issues that need to be discussed.

This venture proved very successful, and it continues today to mean a great deal to the members, as it makes socializing easy and gives the feeling of having someone nearby to call on, especially for those who live alone or are new to the city. It creates a sense of belonging and security to know that AILO friends are close by, to help, for example, with shopping or home and hospital visits.

All new AILO members automatically become part of their neighborhood group and are welcomed by their co-members who live locally.

The regular gatherings vary from home lunches and afternoon teas to Italian style, morning coffees and early evening aperitifs in local venues. Sometimes, the different neighborhood groups mingle for coffees and have joint picnics in the gardens of members' homes, sometimes these were themed events with the gardens decorated to match the occasion.

The neighborhood groups also work together on AILO's activities, including the Bazaar, making art and handmade crafts, and creating gift baskets as lottery and silent auction prizes. At the end

of the year, the *Neighborhoods' Potluck Lunch* allows all the groups to get together, usually in the garden of a member's country home, with car-pooling transport at disposal. The Neighborhood groups are updated each year and listed at the back of the annual membership directory. Each neighborhood has one of its group as *local coordinator*, (originally known as a zone "captain"), who arranges local events and keeps track of individual needs of care and support. In the past, there were as many as 11 neighborhood groups which have now been consolidated into 6 groups. Instead, the *Neighborhood Board Chair* looks after the inter-group communications, represents the different neighborhood voices at Board meetings, and shares their news and proposals at the General Meetings. This allows all of AILO to participate closely in the joys and sadness of its members. The Chair often attends the various other neighborhood events.

CARUSO	*Neighborhoods of the Centro Storico, Stibbert, OP-UP North West Florence & beyond*
GHIRLANDAIO	*Neighborhood of Campo di Marte*
VASARI	*Neighborhoods of Poggio Imperiale & Porta Romana, Santo Spirito*
GIOTTO	*Neighborhoods of Antella, Bagno a Ripoli & beyond, Grassina, Impruneta & beyond*

THE CHIANTI LADIES	*Neighborhood of the Chianti Gallo Region*
OUT OF TOWN and OVERSEAS	*Some members now live abroad, including some Life Members, after long serving AILO and wish to keep in touch with AILO*

A Neighborhood Lunch

NIGHT OWL

NIGHT OWL was AILO's monthly evening meeting, originally intended to accommodate members who were unable to attend the daytime meetings, often because they were working. These enjoyable and very popular evenings became quite a favorite, attended by many members, who often brought along spouses and friends. They were usually hosted by different members in the social atmosphere of their homes. After a welcome and an informal update on the latest AILO's activities, as they emerged at the last general meeting, a light, catered dinner was served, accompanied by a talk by an invited speaker, a poetry reading or a musical performance, all of which became delightful AILO traditions. Sometimes international, exotic food was on the menu. Sometimes a fund-raising initiative like a raffle or similar was included. Frequently, the working year was closed with fun, good food, dancing, and good company at the celebration of the Night Owl Gala Evening.
The *Night Owl Chair* organized these meetings and activities and planned the dates that were published in the yearly calendar. She supported the two foundations of the success of these evenings: the hostesses and the events' management (bookings and payments, catering, entertainment, etc.).
Unfortunately, with the arrival of the Covid pandemic, the Night Owl meetings were suspended and since then has they have struggled to regain momentum but due to their previous popularity, AILO intends to revive these much sought-after occasions in the near future.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES.

SOCIAL activities include the regular lunches after the general meetings, holiday celebrations and other dinners and opportunities to mix and enjoy good food and wine together. Other customary social occasions include the annual Thanksgiving luncheon at which the American Consul General, in his/her role as AILO's Honorary President is also usually present. Then there is the September Welcome Back Tea (a great catch-up occasion to share stories and travel tales with friends and new members after the summer break) and the New Members' Greeting held around February. Sometimes a fundraising initiative for FAWCO or other causes are integrated into these events.
The *Social Chair* chooses the venues (cozy with good food and reasonably priced) and organizes participation lists, payment collections and reservations.

CULTURE is certainly easy for AILO members to enjoy together, considering the beautiful city and country they live in. The activities include visits to permanent and temporary exhibitions, museums, villas, historical sites, gardens, and other places of interest around Florence and its outskirts. Occasionally, overnight excursions are organized to interesting places in Tuscany and other regions. even outside Italy which is not surprising considering AILO's international cultural membership. A group trip was recently organized in Kenya, and another is on the agenda to visit Iceland.

The *Cultural Program Chair* is responsible for developing and directing the cultural activities, sight-seeing trips and tours, organizing the bookings and transport plans, as well as guides, when necessary, helped out by individual members who come up with ideas of where and what to visit.

AILO ONLINE *Website – Facebook – Instagram - Newsletter – Friday Update Email*
Over the last decades, AILO has taken steps to keep pace with modern technology and is now present online with an official **website, Facebook page and Instagram**. The official, regular communication with the membership is also online with the monthly Newsletter and a recently introduced 'Friday Up-date' email to each member offering important last-minute news.

Moving the **Newsletter** online and eliminating the paper copies was started in 2014 and has been a real accomplishment which required time for members to adjust to this change. The editions of the Newsletter are published during the AILO year (October to June) and communicate League activities, organizational policies, and members' news. There are regular reports from the President and the Board chairs, other AILO related titbits, articles on special topics and stories, photographs, recipes, jokes, and a classified section.

The **website** is currently having a face lift, to be ready by the end of June 2025.
The Newsletter Editor produces the publication by the middle of each month.

WEBSITE:	**https://ailo-florence.org**
FACEBOOK:	**https://facebook.com/ailofirenze**
INSTAGRAM:	**https://instagram.com/ailofirenze**

AILO - 1975-2025 Book
The AILO 1975-2025 Book will be available on the AILO website by September 2025. It will be available in both English and Italian.

AILO 50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
All information and photographs of our 50th Anniversary will soon be available on the website.

THANKS
First, **THANKS** are extended to *every AILO member because* they *are AILO* and it is their participation, work and enthusiasm over the years that have filled the contents of this booklet.
Grazie must go as well to the many members who sent in their specifically written pieces: past and present presidents, vice presidents, treasurers, secretaries, and those in the other Board positions. Other contributions have come from the first edition of the booklet and been found in the Newsletters and the various meeting minutes. All these sources have allowed the **AILO Story** to be told, looking back from 2025, with the aim of preserving the past, appreciating the present and accompanying AILO towards its future milestones and achievements.
As far as possible, a *Task Force* has researched the facts and the chronological time span of events

and gathered anecdotes and chit-chat and has worked hard to assure its publication.

REFLECTIONS ON "WHAT BEING A MEMBER OF AILO MEANS TO ME "

Being a member of AILO is an honor and a challenge.

Working together builds friendship.

Life in Florence is enhanced with AILO's positive spirit.

An international family where we do inspiring work for others.

AILO helps to make the world a better place for people in need.

It means being and feeling part of a team.

It gives a sense of accomplishment to contribute to our new community.

AILO makes a big difference to other people's lives and to our own.

AILO is an inspired way of life, and I am proud to be part of it.

With the coronavirus shut down, what would we have done without our AILO friends?

It's very rewarding because it gives a sense of accomplishment.

AILO offers wonderful opportunities, and it is also great fun!

Come join us…