'Garage museum' finds a home

By Tina Calabro for the *Washington Observer-Reporter*   Jun 6, 2018

Joe Mancuso in his Tylerdale garage.

Thanks to a story published in the *Observer-Reporter* on April 14, the effort to find a permanent home for a personal collection of local Italian-American memorabilia has reached its objective.

Clay Kilgore, executive director of the Washington County Historical Society, has signed an agreement with Joe Mancuso, 96, of Tylerdale, to acquire memorabilia collected over a lifetime.

The collection, currently displayed on the walls of the garage at Mancuso's childhood home, tells the story of local Italian-American entertainment and sports figures, such as World Lightweight Champion Sam Angott, the most famous boxer to come out of the city of Washington.

Mementos of Mancuso's military service in World War II and other life events are also featured in his homemade museum.

The collection has "a lot of excellent items," said Kilgore, who learned about the collection from the article. Once the society receives the collection, it will go into storage, but will "rotate in and out of display," he said. Items will also be scanned for digital exhibits on the society's website.

Mancuso's Navy experience in WWII, including supporting the D-Day invasion of Normandy in 1944, will be told in the society's military history collection, Kilgore said. Boxing posters and other sports items will enhance the society's existing sports collection.

Two local men – Joe Kanotz, a clinical social worker, and Tom Olszewski, a retired history teacher and coach – led the effort to find a home for Mancuso's homemade museum. They became acquainted with the treasure trove of photos, news clippings and memorabilia two years ago when Kanotz, a eucharistic minister at St. Hilary Catholic Church, started taking communion to Mancuso's home. Together, the two men documented Mancuso's museum and stories on video. The video will also become part of the historical society's collection.

Joe Mancuso's "museum" features local sports memorabilia.

Kanotz and Olzewski were pleased about the historical society's interest and were present when when Kilgore met Mancuso, assessed the collection and, later, implemented paperwork for the donation.

"The smile on Joe's face made it clear that he was pleased," said Olzewski. "For the historical society to

preserve it for generations to come gave meaning to what he did."

Kilgore said he enjoyed hearing Mancuso's stories during his visits. "It's incredible how sharp and detailed he is."

"I go way, way back," Mancuso mused, adding that he misses the friends who once gathered in his garage to talk about old times. "They would come over and bring things to put on the wall. Those guys are all gone now."

"It's fitting that the collection will stay in Joe's hometown," said Kanotz. "It's nice how the community came together to get this done. "The collection will move to the historical society at a time selected by Mancuso, said Kilgore.

The historical society, located in the LeMoyne House at 49 East Maiden St., Washington, is in the process of expanding its footprint. Renovation of the Palmer House, located across the street, will begin this fall, creating space for a library, archive and offices. Within two years, the society plans to break ground on an education and heritage center on the Palmer House property.

In this 2015 photo, Clay Kilgore, executive director of the Washington County Historical Society, stands inside the LeMoyne House. The society recently agreed to preserve Mancuso's memorabilia.

Mancuso's donation of local history items contributes to the mission of the historical society, said Kilgore.

"We're always interested in people's collections so we can tell the story of Washington County," he said.

For information about donating historical items, contact the Washington County Historical Society at 724-225-6740.

Tina Calabro is volunteer project manager of the Italian Heritage Collection at the Hood Local History Center of Citizens Library.