

SUNDAY
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BIRMINGHAM **Eccentric**

The right style

Tailor slips into role in TV documentary

BY SUSAN STEINMUELLER
STAFF WRITER

Paul Cicchini specializes in perfect fits. An Italian-American immigrant, the Birmingham clothier is among the finest in the U.S.

In turn, Cicchini, 82, was a perfect fit for Keith Famie's new documentary, *Our Italian Story*. The film profiles more than 30 success stories of Italian immigrants in the Detroit metro area.

"He falls into a section in the documentary called industry leaders," said TV producer Famie, who is of Italian heritage himself. "He became and still is the go-to-guy for the 'who's who' in Detroit who want to look their best."

**The story behind
'Our Italian Story,' A4.**

The documentary shows how immigrants like Cicchini had to overcome obstacles as they pursued the American Dream. The one-time perception of Italians was one of them.

"There's a passion for Italian design and style that's apparent today. But if you go back to the 1920s the Italians were looked down upon as laborers, given no respect," said Famie. "He came here with nothing and floated to the top."

Cicchini says he readily agreed to be in the documentary.

"I'm an old-timer, I'm Italian. I've been very active in the Italian community, so I said fine, sounds good to me.

"Myself, I am very proud to be an Italian-American immigrant."

SERVING HIS COUNTRY

Cicchini spoke recently from Cicchini

PLEASE SEE **DOCUMENTARY, A4**



Tailor Paul Cicchini will be featured in the documentary 'Our Italian Story.'

DOCUMENTARY

FROM PAGE A1

Custom Clothier on South Old Woodward in Birmingham. He sold it to one-time employee Rick DePanicis, of Troy, but still works there part time.

The dapper Cicchini wore his own label, a custom gray, single-breasted suit. On his silk tie was a gold scissors tie clip; a measuring tape was draped around his neck.

Cicchini's story begins in France, where he was born. His Italian parents then moved to Vasto in central Italy.

There his father chose tailoring as a trade for his son. He began his apprenticeship at "6 or 7" while going to school as his mother wanted him to.

His father moved to Detroit, getting a job with Ford and sent for his son in 1940.

"I came with the last ship, Rex, that was able to cross the ocean before the war," he said.

He was working for a tailor when "Uncle Sam intervened. I was drafted."

The armed forces sent him to England, where ironically he was granted American citizenship. The trip to the U.S. consulate probably saved his life as he missed the "D-day" Normandy invasion while there, he said.

Cicchini served in France and Belgium.

"Along the way, I met a cute little French girl that I fell in love with."

Yvonne and Paul Cicchini celebrated their 61st anniversary on Nov. 19.

BEING THE BEST

Back in the U.S., Cicchini had a goal as he opened his own tailor business.

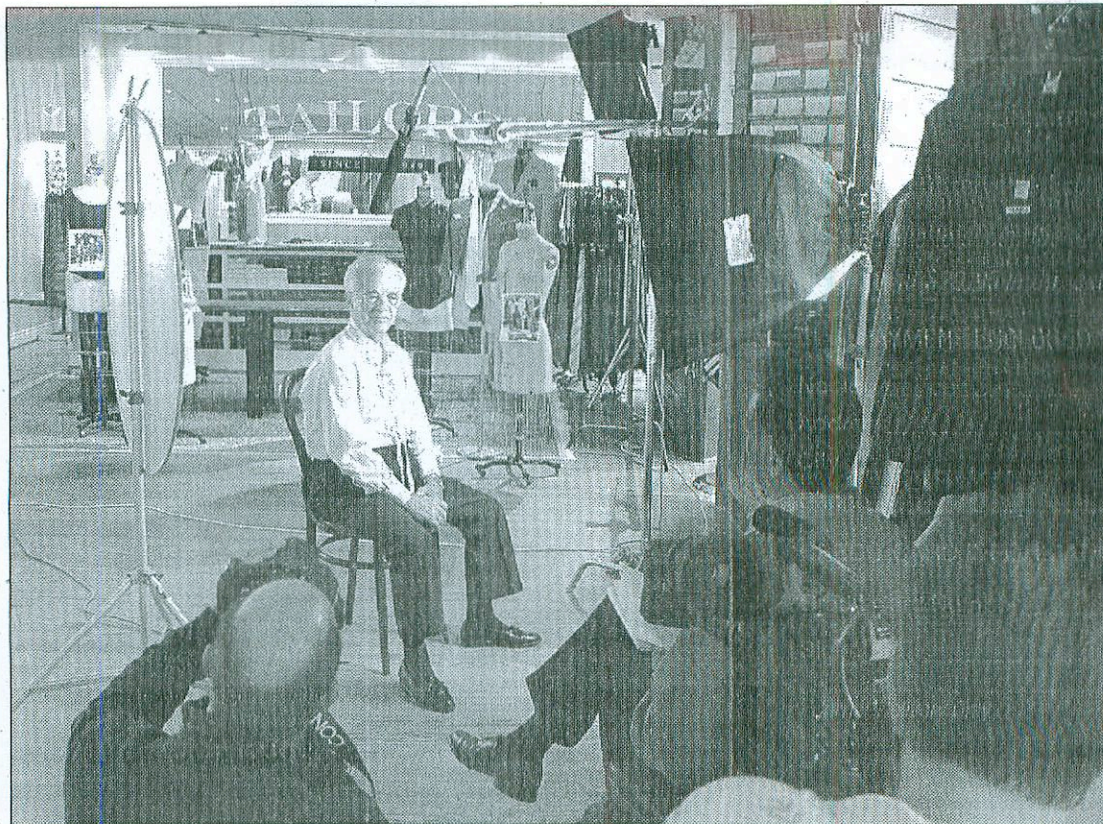
"I wanted to be the best tailor in the world." He said his father had taught him to be the best at whatever he did.

DePanicis says Cicchini achieved that. "There are only a handful of his caliber in America and the world."

For 25 years, Cicchini made custom clothes in Detroit's Kales Building. Then he followed the exodus to the suburbs.

"I was always an 'upstairs' tailor." Business came through word of mouth.

"When I sold my business, they moved it downstairs. They are younger, more progressive."



Paul Cicchini is taking part in Keith Famie's documentary 'Our Italian Story.'

'OUR ITALIAN STORY'

Our Italian Story is a one-hour documentary about Detroit's Italian heritage. It is produced by Keith Famie of Visionalist Entertainment Productions and features many Eccentric-area residents. Among them: Tony Filippis, 91, whose business, Wright & Filippis in Troy, is an industry leader in rehabilitative health care; and former Rochester Hills resident Tony Ciccone, a retired physicist whose Ciccone Vineyards is a pioneer winemaker in the Leelanau area - and whose entertainer daughter, Madonna, is a household name.

Lipari Foods, a world class food distributor, is a title sponsor, enabling the documentary to be commercial-free when it airs on television. Founder Jim Lipari, who has a rags-to-riches story, was interviewed along with son, Thom.

Our Italian Story debuts tonight in a benefit event of Italian cuisine and culture at the Rock Financial Showplace in Novi. It will air on WXYZ-TV 7 at 7 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 9; 1 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 16 and 9 a.m. Sunday, Dec. 25.

Famie, also a chef and cookbook author, plans four documentaries. The next will focus on Polish immigrants to the Detroit area.

For more information, go to his Web site: www.ourstoryof.com

One of Cicchini's clients, former Detroit police commissioner Herbert Hart, was named as one of the best dressed men in America. "He liked high style clothes, and I would make things that nobody made before, different styling, pockets."

After that he said his phone rang off the hook with new business.

Many prominent clients remain with him today.

Fine service was offered too. For instance, clients could get a fitting at their home or office.

Cicchini says the making of a suit is an art and a skill.

"The garment has to be cut, designed, made to balance the posture of the person. The garment has to fall straight, and no wrinkles."

Suits at the clothier go from \$800 for a "made to measure" suit; and \$1,500 to \$23,000 for a handmade one.

"If they have the money, why not?" he says of the wearers of his suits. "The person that wears it knows the difference."

Hanging in the store is a coat for \$19,000. It's made of vicuna, the most expensive fabric in the world,

"It sells for more than \$3,000 a yard," he said, urging one to feel its softness.

ACCOLADES

The Cicchinis are former Redford Township residents and now reside in Bloomfield Hills. They have four children and four grandchildren.

Cicchini has held leadership positions in many organizations and remains active with many. Locally he is president this year of the Birmingham Lions Club.

His accolades include the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Tailors and Designers Association.

"I am proud to be of Italian heritage but I am also proud to be an American," says Cicchini. "I want to leave this world a little better than when I came, not only in my personal life but in my business. I love what I am doing."