

## OTHER VIEWS

# A Touch Of Italy In Temple Terrace

Sal LoPresti has never had a thing for cars. Like most of us, he simply wants an automobile to work — regardless of flash or speed.

So had anyone told him that he would spend more than 29 years owning and operating his own auto body repair business, he would not have believed it.

A & S Body Shop in Temple Terrace is where LoPresti has come to work every day since May 1976. The place is filled with the looks and sounds of any other car repair shop. Autos with dings and dents and greater miseries line the lot. Young men work hard with wrenches and mallets, pounding and prying and twisting to try to make good again these sad souls on wheels.

What is a little different here is the man in charge — and the way he runs his business.

I met LoPresti in early January of this year. A small fender-bender had left a mighty mark on the face of my Oldsmobile. The headlights were shattered, the grille gone and the hood bent. For the old car, all seemed lost.

LoPresti skipped lunch on a Satur-



**MARLENE FLYNN**  
Community Columnist  
commcol@tampatrib.com

day afternoon to pry open that hood to see if what remained underneath was still good. Once he saw that it was, he resolved to make sure the hood stayed securely shut. With a furrowed brow, he pounded and pried at it for more than an hour. He stopped only when he felt sure it would not fly open mid-traffic.

In his tiny office, he explained my options in plain, Sicilian-coated English. I listened while taking in the photos and prints on his walls: a panorama of Venice, men with big fish, the Italian flag, snapshots of friends, more big fish.

Many months later, I would ask him to tell me a bit about these pictures.

Salvatore LoPresti came to the United States from Sicily on Jan. 18, 1964. He was 26. He spoke no English

and carried no more than \$150 in his pocket. He and his brother Vincenzo boarded the Leonardo da Vinci to make the 18-day trip to New York City so they could make a new life for themselves.

"It was the best trip I ever had in my life," he says of his time aboard the packed cruise ship. He recalls his first glimpse of the Statue of Liberty and the great impression it made upon him.

He stayed in the Bronx for about a year and a half — he proudly remembers the exact dates — until he went back to Sicily to marry Maria Cullaro. Six months later, he returned to the Bronx with his wife.

Bricklaying was his only trade, so he spent his first couple of years in New York working any construction job he could get. LoPresti makes clear that "it was really tough."

A few years later, LoPresti and his wife made the long drive to Tampa to visit his *cumpare*, or best friend, Angelo Urso. Their stay became permanent, and Angelo convinced LoPresti to go into business with him. In May 1976 the friends started A & S Body Shop — the "A" for Angelo, the "S" for Salvatore. Sadly, Angelo died some years ago, but the business is still called A & S.

"I knew nothing about cars. I had to

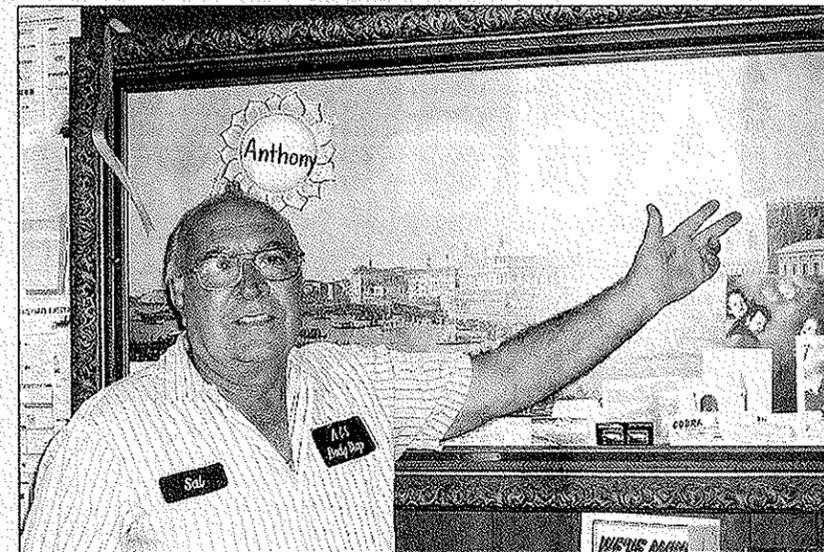


Photo by MARLENE FLYNN

Portraits of Italy decorate Sal LoPresti's A&S Body Shop and constantly remind him of his immigrant roots.

learn from scratch," LoPresti says. In time his car knowledge grew, and he developed a philosophy.

"I want to see the car fixed and people treated honestly. I never got rich and never will be because of this. But you tell a lie [to a customer] just to make more money — where does that lie go? Back to you. I don't want that."

This belief has built him a loyal clientele. But he has more than honesty. He is an Old World gentleman, and his clients love him for it.

"I think his magnetism is what makes this business the success it is," suggests LoPresti's son, Angelo, who works with his father.

And what does LoPresti enjoy when he is not busy working on cars?

"Number one, family. But also fishing. And I love to eat."

He takes time to show me snapshots of big grouper and bigger redfish. If cars are not his passion, then perhaps fishing is. Before I leave, he offers me an espresso. He apologizes for not offering it to me earlier.

"You see, I am no longer a real Italian. A real Italian would have offered this right away."

But with his words sounding like music, he is pure Italian — a touch of Italy in little Temple Terrace.

*Marlene Flynn is a Tampa native. A student, she divides her time between Tampa and Gainesville, where she is majoring in French and history at the University of Florida.*



Keyword: Community Columnists, to read other recent columns.

## Floridians In Congress Fight Drilling Legislation

An explosion at an offshore natural gas drilling site caused a 200,000-gallon crude oil spill off California's coast in January 1969. Oil

coated 35 miles of coastline, blackening

lican, and Jim Davis, a Democrat, along with 20 other members of Florida's bipartisan congressional delegation, signed a letter in opposition to drilling closer to the state. And just two weeks ago, 19 senators

