

COMMENDATORE LENA GUSTIN MBE
("Mamma Lena")

Tonight we are raising funds to complete a documentary on a truly remarkable member of our community. Mamma Lena.

Lena Gustin arrived in Australia with her family in 1956 and, through a twist of fate, was soon a household name with weekly advice columns in "La Fiamma" and nightly Italian language radio programmes first on 2CH and then on each of 2KY (with the horses) and 2SER. Her radio activities spanned more than 30 years. Produced by her husband Dino, the informative and entertaining content of her radio programmes ensured a large audience of Italian migrants. Lena's warm and friendly style gave comfort, practical advice and assistance to a generation of migrants who, hungry for news and music from their "homeland", would be glued to their radio to hear programmes such as "Sorella Radio" and "Arrivederci Roma".

In 1967 Lena Gustin was recognised by the Queen and the Australian Government with an MBE for her humanitarian work with migrants. It was also around this time that Lena was given the title she has cherished most in her life - "Mamma Lena". The name, immortalized in songs, poems and books, truly epitomises Mamma Lena's true calling. That of nurturer to all who needed her. If there was an Italian family to be helped she was there. If there was an earthquake or flood in Italy the radio programmes ensured donations to help. We can't even begin to imagine how many people Mamma Lena has helped. Nor can we underestimate her determination and influence. In the 30 years she was active in radio, there was not a Minister or Prime Minister that Mamma Lena did not canvas to help those in need. Mamma Lena's radio programmes were the first to be given permission to broadcast bilingually. She was a true pioneer of multiculturalism. In 1968 the Italian Government made her a "Cavaliere" and in 1999 a "Commendatore". She is the most decorated Italian woman in Australia.

A 714 page book by Dino Gustin - "70 Years of Memories in Two Worlds" goes part of the way to document the massive amount of work that Mamma Lena and Dino did for the community, including the construction of two child care centres. The first was in Poggioreale. After a devastating earthquake, Dino took the funds raised by donations through the radio programmes to Poggioreale, to ensure that they be used for the intended purpose. The second is in Fairfield where the "Mamma Lena Child Care Centre", finished in 1982, is a non profit centre and proudly looks after 65 children from birth to pre-school.

It is important to the Italian community that Mamma Lena's legacy is preserved for future generations. She is a treasure and it is right to preserve her story. The State Library of NSW is custodian of a large amount of material on Mamma Lena and when producer Joanne Rowe mooted the idea of a Documentary on her life to the Committee of the Mamma Lena Foundation, it was enthusiastically embraced. Among other films, Joanne Rowe is accredited with the production of the highly acclaimed documentary on the Australian Saint, Mary McKillop. Likewise, the film on Mamma Lena will be a high quality documentary that can be included in libraries and schools and even publicly aired at film festivals and on television. The documentary will be called "Mamma Lena - an Italian Icon" and still needs \$30,000 for completion.

We are grateful for your assistance tonight. Enjoy!

The Committee of the Mamma Lena Foundation

P.S Contributions of \$500 or more will be given immortal status via credits on the film.