

Italian city, nuts for Suffolk, plans to bring festival to town

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THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

— First, it was a Then a statue of Mr. Now, it's just a big arty. y's romance with its ter city rages on. -person entourage ly, complete with gers, a pastry chef, ruit and vegetable will descend on Suffolk to help throw an stival. sitors are coming rzo, a small town just Venice that is one of two sister municipal-; also the hometown

of Amedeo Obici, the founder of Planters Peanuts in Suffolk.

The Aug. 13 event will mark the third exchange between the cities in as many years. In 2003, the Italians gave Suffolk a mosaic fountain, placed downtown. In 2004, city officials here returned the favor, traveling to the small town in the foothills of the Dolomites mountain range to deliver a \$3,600 cast-iron statue of Mr. Peanut — the top-hat-wearing symbol of the nut company.

The Italians will pay their own way in August, and most of the money to throw the festival will be raised by private fundraising, said city spokesman Dennis Craff. The city's

ODERZO, ITALY

Population: 17,600

Location: 25 miles north of Venice

Birthplace of Amedeo Obici, founder of Planters peanuts

Said to be founded by Roman Emperor Julius Caesar in 45 B.C.

contribution is still being worked out, said Cynthia Rohlf, assistant city manager.

Suffolk spent about \$10,000 last summer to send five city officials to Oderzo to deliver the Mr. Peanut statue.

Festival organizers are billing the latest event as a chance to experience true Italian culture.

"What started as an Italian-American festival has gone strictly authentic Italian," said Mary Jane Naismith, chair of the Suffolk Sister City Commission. "There will not be Pizza Hut or hot dogs at this festival."

The seven-member Sister City Commission is appointed by the City Council to build educational, cultural and economic exchanges with Oderzo and Suffolk's other sister municipality, Suffolk County, England.

The main attraction at the festival — at the Constant's

Wharf at the new Hilton Garden Inn and Suffolk Conference Center downtown — will be a 20-member group of "alpine singers" from Oderzo who will perform traditional Italian songs. An Italian chef and a food sculptor will give workshops, and an impersonator of Obici is expected to attend, Naismith said.

The Italian visitors will be treated to a boat cruise up the Nansemond River, and many will stay in the homes of Suffolk residents during their five-day trip, Naismith said.

Naismith isn't sure how big the festival will be, but she's hoping to raise \$10,000 to \$15,000 to cover costs.

"We don't know if we have 200 or 20,000 people," she said. "The Italians keep saying, 'How much food do we need to cook?' I just say, 'Whenever the food is gone, it's gone.'"

One local businessman originally from Italy, plans to combine Suffolk's peanut legacy with a popular Italian treat for the festival.

Ivan Gherardini said he'll honor Obici and Suffolk by making peanut gelato.

"Everybody loves peanut butter," he said.

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