

Tulane associate dean upholds Italian tradition in the Crescent City

March 16, 2018 11:15 AM Faith Dawson
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As president of the Italian-American Bocce Club of Greater New Orleans, T.J. Stranova, right, associate dean for student affairs and admissions in the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, plays bocce for sport, community and tradition. The club attracts league players but welcomes guests, too. (Photo provided by Italian-American Bocce Club of Greater New Orleans)

A Tulane associate dean is helping to keep an old New Orleans tradition alive.

[T.J. Stranova](#), associate dean for student affairs and admissions in the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, is president of the Italian-American Bocce Club of Greater New Orleans. In the sport of bocce, players throw balls at a target ball

called a pallino. The ball that lands closest to the pallino earns a point; after a series of throws, the match goes to the player or team with the most points.

“It’s one of the oldest sports known to man,” Stranova said. “Depending on who you ask, bocce is actually the third most-played game in the world, after soccer and golf.”

Basic bocce rules date all the way back to early Rome, where statesmen and rulers played the sport, according to the U.S. Bocce Federation. The sport is often associated with Italian culture and heritage.

In New Orleans, the [Italian-American Bocce Club](#), founded in 1971, saw its membership decline after Hurricane Katrina. That’s how Stranova entered the picture.

“I was part of another Italian-American society that did a big St. Joseph’s Day food altar at Cabrini,” Stranova said. That group eventually disbanded when its members grew too old to be actively involved. Some of those same individuals were members of the local bocce club, the fate of which was similarly threatened.

“When bocce club was about to fold, I jumped in and decided to volunteer as president. I felt so bad that we had lost an Italian-American cultural organization that I didn’t want to lose another one,” he said.

Stranova grew up playing bocce at family gatherings in the Boston area. Now, as club president, he manages the leagues, recruits new players, raises funds for the organization — and mops the floors.

“I call it my second full-time job,” said Stranova. “I’m trying to be a good ambassador of both bocce and Italian-American culture and organizations in New Orleans.”

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