



And the Italian Brand Ambassador Award Goes to...

Natasha Lardera (June 05, 2014)



Mel Bompreszi, Vice President of Grocery & Natural Foods merchandising at Kroger Co. and Steve Jenkins, Vice President of Imports at Fairway Market, were recognized by the Italian Trade Commission for their vision, dedication, drive and passion which have contributed to growing the Made in Italy Brand in the US consumer marketplace

[The Italian Trade Commission](#) [2] of New York, has recognized “Industry Trailblazers” of the Made in Italy with the first edition of the Italian Brand Ambassador Award, on Sunday, June 1

ceremony which took place at the Highline Ballroom.

Presented in collaboration with [Emirates Airline](#) [3], [Colavita USA](#) [4] and [Monini North America](#) [5], the award ceremony recognized two leaders in the retail food sector whose vision, dedication, drive and passion have contributed to growing the Made in Italy Brand in the US consumer



marketplace over the course of their careers.

This year's award paid tribute to "Italy's Liquid Gold" and celebrated the success of premium Italian olive oil in the US market in both qualitative and quantitative terms. "This is not just an award," Trade Commissioner and Executive Director for the USA, [Pier Paolo Celeste](#) [6] said when presenting the winners, "this symbolizes a commitment, a lifelong engagement because once you have got to know the quality and taste of Italian products you can't just stop."

"The Italian Brand Ambassador Award exemplifies the qualitative relationship between Italy, its import partners and the evolution of products positioned in these markets" Pier Paolo Celeste continued, "The recipients of the Award this first year are respected businessmen whose retail philosophies have contributed to the paramount success of their retail chain operations. It is precisely the important relationships cultivated with consumers across retail aisles that allows Italy to consolidate and grow its position in the US market. The confidence placed in the quality of our products coupled with the leadership of our import, distributor and retail partners is the true impetus of our market expansion."

The awards, handed out by Italy's Minister of Health, [Beatrice Lorenzin](#) [7], were given to Mel Bompreszi, Vice President of Grocery & Natural Foods merchandising at [Kroger Co.](#) [8] and [Steve Jenkins](#) [9], Vice President of Imports at Fairway Market.

"As a second generation Italian American" Bompreszi said when accepting the award, "all I did

was continue the family's tradition of enjoying good food." Bompreszi started working for Kroger Co. in 1979, and through the years he has moved from meat cutter, to head produce buyer, meat merchandiser and in 2004 he was promoted to Vice President of Merchandising in the Columbus Division. "This award makes me proud," he added, "but most of all my 90 year old father is ecstatic. He taught me how to appreciate good quality, authentic Italian food products."

"I get paid for my hobby," Steve Jenkins said, "I've been so lucky to dedicate my life, since 1975,

to Italian food. Sometime back then I also met my wife. My career took off in 1978 when we

st, at a traveled to Italy, discovered Fontina cheese and introduced it to Americans. Fontina cheese has been made in the Aosta Valley, a small region in the Alps, since the 12th century. Up to then Americans thought it came from Sweden and Denmark. There is indeed a cheese made there labeled Fontina, and it can be distinguished from Italian Fontina by its red wax rind and milder flavor. I knew I had to bring these unknown products to the US, educate consumers and cooks. All real cooks had to have the real thing in their kitchens."

Jenkins is credited with having introduced countless cheeses and other foodstuff to New Yorkers, and subsequently the rest of the US, and continues to generate remarkable publicity and public awareness for food artisans and artisanal foods. "A few years back," Jenkins continued to explain, "I was invited by the Italian Trade Commission to an event featuring Italian products. Everybody was paying attention to the chefs and nobody as paying attention to me. But it's important to give retailers the credit they deserve. We are the ones who promote your products."

Jenkins, who played a big role in the introduction of products like balsamic vinegar, colatura anchovy sauce and saba, was recently named one of the 25 most important people in the history of the American specialty foods industry.

"This award could not be more deserved," [Fred Plotkin](#) [10], gourmand, author of "Italy for the Gourmet Traveler" and a guest at the evening said, "Jenkins has always been essential in educating Americans to recognizing Italian products and enjoying them. He was always in the store, talking, tasting, comparing..."

The award ceremony was followed by a jazz concert featuring acclaimed Italian jazz talent



[Gianluca Pellerito](#) [11] and his quintet. Pellerito was the youngest musician in the world to play at the Blue Note at just age fourteen.

Performances include eight seasons at [Umbria Jazz](#) [12], the 2012 London Olympics, an exhibition show for former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and a performance upon invitation from the Kennedy family at the Kennedy Center to name a few.

As he was playing, guests were enjoying platters of Prosciutto di Parma DOP and Arista di Maiale (both from Parmacotto USA); Asiago DOP, Piave DOP and Grana Padano DOP (from [Agriform](#) [13]); focaccia bread seasoned with Badia a Coltibuono evoo, Cesare Casella Tuscan evoo, Colavita evoo, Colonna evoo, Galuffo evoo, La Baita evoo, Monini evoo and Terre di Grifonetto evoo.

Everything was more savory paired with Maschio Prosecco Brut DOC.

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[7] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beatrice_Lorenzin

[8] <http://www.thekrogerco.com/>

[9] <http://oldwayspt.org/bio/steven-jenkins>

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