TRANSCRIPT

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EPISODE NAME: Former ATF Producer Lyn Jarvis and WCAX-TV Weathercaster Sharon Meyer Visit Venice and Florence, Italy

((p-Italy #1))

Lyn Jarvis / Across the Fence: Hello, I'm Lyn Jarvis, contributing editor for Across the Fence and today our tour of Italy. I am joined by WCAX-TV's Sharon Meyer. Sharon, I think our viewers are in for a treat, as everyone who's been here tells me it is one of their favorite vacation spots. I am excited to get started.

Sharon Meyer / WCAX-TV: So am I...we will be visiting some of the well-known places in Italy, like Venice and Florence, but knowing Lyn's love of adventure, I'm sure he'll fine some interesting places on "the road less traveled."

Lyn: We'll find out soon enough. I think I can hear someone playing the accordion.

Music

Sharon: As you have probably guessed we will begin our adventure in Venice, sometimes called the floating city, as it stretches across 117 small islands with 177 canals. It is among the most important tourist destinations in the world, with an average of 50,000 visitors a day. And with no cars and buses here, it's a different world where good walking shoes are a must. Even though crowded with people, it's a relief to be away from the congestion and noise of busy streets and highways. Then how do people get around? By boat and barge that move through the many canals 24 hours a day. And it certainly made map reading a whole new experience trying to figure out the maze of waterways. My husband Rene and Marco, the video editor for our show today, soon got the gist of it and kept us on track.
The origins of Venice go back almost two centuries when men fished the marshy lagoons around the small islands. By the 13th century it was the most prosperous city in all of Europe ... because of its location ... and more than 3,000 ships, allowed it to dominate Mediterranean commerce. To keep up with the rapid expansion, early engineers devised a unique plan to accommodate the influx of people. The buildings of Venice are constructed on closely spaced wood poles brought in from the mainland. Under water, the wood does not decay and becomes a tough as steel and many of the original poles are still intact after centuries of submersion. Venice is home to some of the most world's most renowned pieces of architecture and landmarks that have ever been built. Among them is St. Mark's Basilica, an enormous medieval church adorned with 5 domes, consecrated in 1094, it is among the world's best known examples of Byzantine architecture.

The Basilica overlooks one of the most beautiful squares in all of northern Italy...St. Mark's Square. Here thousands of civil and religious ceremonies have taken place and where we invested in the most expensive ice cream dessert ever, but it tasted so good in the shadows of this historic building. Besides being crowded with people and many great examples of architecture, St. Mark’s Square is filled with pigeons. Although they cause damage to the delicate mosaics and statues, tourists including yours truly, enjoy feeding them.

Before leaving St. Mark's Square there are more things to see. This is the campanile, or bell tower, and at 323 feet, it is one of the city’s most recognizable landmarks. In the Piazzetta, or little plaza, is this tall granite column and at the top is the winged lion, the symbol of St. Mark, the patron saint of Venice. Early government was similar to that of ancient Rome with elected officials, led by the Doge, who lived in this palace that adjoins the Basilica. Water taxis are everywhere in Venice...you just have to know which one to take. We are headed for Murano, famous for glass making.

In 1921, all the glassmakers were forced to leave Venice due to the risk of fire and they found Murano an ideal location. The glassmakers are renowned for the high quality and beauty of their creations. And they have developed and refined many unique techniques including enameled and multicolored glass. Artisans still employ glass making skills passed down through the generations. After browsing through the many shops, we liked this place the best and went inside.

We were greeted by Diego Vidal who has been a glass maker since childhood. The firing oven averages 2400 degrees Fahrenheit and we could feel the heat from across the room. While red hot, he began to twist and twirl the molten glass. Working fast, before it cooled, we wondered what Diego was creating. I
was amazed...he was making a horse. Through some kind of mental telepathy, he must have known of my fondness for horses. In about 5 minutes, he had created this intricate glass horse. We were impressed. Just see how beautiful his creation looks on the show room shelf in the afternoon sun.

Enjoying a gondola ride through the quaint canals of Venice is an experience that cannot be replicated anywhere else. Climb aboard with us and enjoy the ride.

Music

Lyn: We are in Florence, the capital city of the Italian region of Tuscany. It is regarded as one of the most beautiful cities in the world and the impact of its artistic, historic, and cultural heritage is legendary. Many consider Florence the art capital of Italy and we just happened to be here on June 2nd, Independence Day in Italia. Everyone was in a festive mood and these street performers got us off to a good start.

Music

Florence was the most important city in Europe from the 14th to the 16th century due to the Medici family who transformed it into the cradle of the Renaissance. For a while, it was the capital city of Italy and Florence was modernized with wider streets, but now days, there never seems to be enough room for all the tourists. During World War 2, the city was heavily damaged by bombs and all the bridges were destroyed except for Ponte Vecchio...many claiming it was considered too beautiful to be destroyed and spared by orders from Hitler himself.

We had heard a lot about Ponte Vecchio, that crosses the River Arno, and we enjoyed our walk across this historic bridge, built in 1345 it's now a mecca for those with fat wallets in search of the finest gold from around the world. Without a doubt, the best known site in Florence is the domed cathedral known as the Duomo, designed by Filippo Brunelleschi. The dome, 600 years after its completion, is still the largest ever built of brick and mortar using some 4 million bricks. Standing next to the Duomo is the Campanile, or bell tower, that took 25 years to complete with a colorful façade of pink and white Tuscan marble. A huge bust of Brunelleschi now sits outside the Duomo looking thoughtfully up towards his greatest accomplishment.

Not far from the Duomo is the Galleria dell Accademia, the home of Michelangelo's biblical hero David, the slayer of Goliath, and we joined the long
line go inside. About 45 minutes later we entered the gallery and there he was, a breathtaking sight. It took young Michelangelo 2 years to create David from a block of left over marble found on a nearby mountain. Because of David's biblical fame, the statue came to symbolize the defiance of Florence against the powerful Medici family. The eyes of David, with their warning glare, were turned towards Rome. For over 300 years David stood in the Plaza della Signoria in defiance of Roman authority. As power struggles faded, in 1873, it was decided to move David inside to his present location. It took 4 days to move the 17foot tall---6 ton statue the half mile.

While traveling, friendships often develop and 4 months ago, while in Antarctica, I met Francesco Cirignoni from Milan, Italy. It's not far from Florence so he, along with his niece Letizia, joined us for the day. They were most appreciative of my gift of Vermont maple syrup and after a good visit, sightseeing was next on the agenda.

Our first stop was St. Minias on the Mountain. Standing atop one of the highest points in the city, the church dates from 1013 and is run by the Olivetan monks. Inside is an ancient Romanesque pulpit adorned with elaborate mosaics depicting scenes that were painted a thousand years ago...it's hard to grasp just how old things are over here.

After our tour, Francesco entertained us with stories about life in Italy and his career in the insurance business. By now it was time for lunch and we were treated to a real Italian feast at Trattoria Omero, like the Homer of the Iliad. It was a beautiful place with a spectacular view of the Tuscan country side with its olive trees and vineyards.

Francesco Cirignoni: Talks about dining in a typical Italian restaurant. It is special, and you must eat everything. It is very good and this is a very famous restaurant, he says.

Our day with Francesca and Letizia ended at Boboli Gardens, an open-air museum dating from Roman antiquity with beautiful architecture, landscape designs ... and marble stairs that provide a spectacular view of Pitti Palace, now a public art gallery housing a silver and porcelain museums and painting by such artists as Raphael, Titian, and Peter Paul Rubens. We decided that we needed a break from the crowds of Florence and headed for the country. On the road to San Gimaghano, we got our first glimpse of the small medieval hill town known for its many towers.
The wealthy families who lived here built these tower houses as symbols of wealth and power...And for secure lodging from invaders who constantly ransacked their wealthy village.

Walking through the narrow streets is like stepping into the middle ages and getting a taste of what San Gimighano must have been like hundreds of years ago. The heart of town is Piazza della Cisterna. Once the town water supply, it is now a popular gathering place for tourists. Sharon and I found another place more to our taste: Pluripremiata, one of the best gelato makers in Italy boasting many awards for their sweet treat.

I was partial to the creamy sweet cherry while Sharon favored the tangy lemon. From the highest point in San Gimighano we got this spectacular view of the vineyards in the valley below, and from these vines comes the famous Vernaccia, considered one of the finest of Italian white wines. And at a nearby winery, Poggio Amorelli, we learned how the wine is made from owner Marco Mazzarini.

Marco Mazzarini / Vineyard Owner: “Following the harvest, I have a machine to divide the stem from the fruit. It does the work, and eventually it goes to the cellar for fermentation.”

He produces some 150 thousand bottles of wine a year and for you connoisseurs, some of his blends are in the Super Tuscan category...a name invented by Americans for the most expensive Italian wines that sell for several hundred dollars a bottle. And what better way to wrap up our visit to the Italian wine country...than with a toast to all you loyal Across the Fence viewers ... and no, this is not the Super Tuscan blend.

Lyn: I can see why visitors who come to Italy enjoy the country so much. It's a beautiful place isn't it? Sharon: Yes, there is so much history here, the museums are amazing, the food is delicious, and the people are wonderful. Lyn: And don't forget that Italian wine. And if you enjoyed what you saw today, Sharon and I will be back tomorrow as we make our way to Rome and the Isle of Capri. I'm Lyn Jarvis for Across the Fence and from Sharon and me...Thank you for watching.