

Ep.53 - Allegra Baistrocchi

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SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Allegra Baistrocchi



Announcer 00:01

Welcome to The Michigan Opportunity, an economic development podcast featuring candid conversations with business leaders across Michigan. You'll hear firsthand accounts from Michigan business leaders and innovators about how the state is driving job growth and business investment, supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, building vibrant communities and helping to attract and retain one of the most diverse and significant workforces in the nation.



Ed Clemente 00:28

Hello, I'm Ed Clemente. I'm your host today and we're very fortunate to have Allegra Baistrocchi Consul of Italy, at the Consulate of Italy in Detroit. Is that correct?



Allegra Baistrocchi 00:40

Yes Ed, that is absolutely correct. Thank you so much for having me.



Ed Clemente 00:44

Yes. And, you know, I'm really excited to have you on, obviously, because I'm Italian. But you're new to the area too. And it's fortunate that we get to learn about what really goes on, you know, with with Consuls in the Consulates in America somewhat, because I think a lot of people don't know. And they don't realize how important it is, I think for the economy, not only of Italy, but for Michigan as well. And so let's get a little bit first. So what's like, if you met someone at a party, and you met them for the very first time, they've never heard of what a consul is, what would you tell them you do?



A

Allegra Baistrocchi 01:20

Okay, first off, thank you for having me. And I'm super excited to be here. And obviously, Ed Clemente is super Italian, so you've got two of us today. What does the consul do? I get asked this a lot and to be honest, in Michigan, less people know than in other places that I lived in before. Possibly because there's less of us here in Michigan, there's only six diplomat consuls, there's a lot of honorary consuls, but that's a different sort of ordeal. What a consul does. Since I get asked at dinner parties, I usually answer, do you know what an embassy does? [Good] You're nodding, do you know what an embassy does?

E

Ed Clemente 02:00

Oh, you're asking me. Yeah, well, I know the basic is usually to help out citizens of their own country, sometimes in the country they're stationed in as well as the business interest sometimes for those similar things.

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 02:13

Exactly. So basically, an embassy is the representation of a government in a capital city. So in Washington, we have the Embassy of Italy to Washington, and they take care of political relations. They do Consular Relations in the sense of assistance if need be, they do commercial relations. But embassies are only in capital cities, in all other cities that are deemed of importance to a government, and obviously every government can decide where to have them, we have a consulate. So we have one in Detroit. We've actually had a consular agent in Detroit from 1899, which shows how deep the ties are between Italy and Michigan. And obviously that's evolved, so first we had a consular agent, then we had a vice consulate. And then we've been a proper consulate since 1946. And that's also evolved jurisdiction-wise because I've responsible, not only for Michigan, but also for Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee. And the fact that we're stationed though in Detroit makes it that obviously Detroit is the city of most relevant to us. From an Italian point of view, immigration, quantity of population, obviously, the auto industry really increased those numbers, but also from a commercial point of view. So you know, businesses here, a trade that we can help. So a console job is basically twofold. On the one side we provide the services both for Italian nationals and for non-Italian nationals. So for your Italian nationals, we do everything from renewing passports, renewing driver's license, if you need your school University transcripts to be valid in Italy we do that. We you know, register all the significant moments in your life, the births, marriages, the not so happy ones divorce and death. We you know, we provide assistance if somebody has been injured, if somebody has been jailed, you know, we we provide assistance for the Italians in our jurisdiction. And again, in those five states that I represent. We also provide services for non-Italian so one thing we do is visas now an American doesn't need a visa if he's just going for tourism under three months. But if you need a longer visa, if you need to go want to go study in Italy, which is great, if you want to have elective residency go and live in Italy for a couple of years, you can do that and we provide those services not only to Americans, but non-Americans that also need a visa for some some countries need shorter stay visas as well. We also do all things involved with citizenship. So if you are of Italian descent, or you married somebody Italian, you know, we take you through the steps and we provide you with you know, with all the different things. And that that that go into getting that citizenship granted. So that's the services aspect of it. But the part that I like most is the promotional aspect. So on one hand culture on the other hand, commercial business investments. And it makes sense, so culturally,

we are, so we are in the US right now and that is the first superpower of the world, right? But Italy, [hopefully, yes] But Italy is the number one cultural superpower. The Wharton School of Business actually said that Italy's cultural sway is the most of the world. So anything from art to music, we love promoting anything Italian our Italian language, we have a fantastic, the Dante Alighieri Michigan that gives great Italian lessons. And then the commercial aspect, which is the the part that I love absolutely the most. I love anything, you know, that has to do with promoting Italian products. So whether it be trade or investment, you know, that's what what I'm all about. And I like to give also the idea of the more contemporary Italy. I think a lot of the people that are of Italian heritage, are a second or third generation, they have a bit of a crystallized idea of what Italy represents now. But we are a very contemporary, very technological, very advanced country. So if I say to you, for example, do you equate Italy to space, as in like, outer space?

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Ed Clemente 06:33

Most people would say no, right?

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Allegra Baistrocchi 06:35

Yes, they would say no, but for example, anything that is in the International Space Station, any product or material, 40% of that is made by Italian companies. And so you don't think of it as being like, you know, Italy, something to do with space. But it's interesting, because we actually have two companies in Michigan, Italian, that have stuff to do with space. So we have Leonardo, one of our biggest defense and aerospace companies. They have an office here in Michigan, they also have production in Ohio, and BLM group, which does processes and systems and they're based out of Novi. So we have some very technological Italianness here in Michigan.

E

Ed Clemente 07:13

In the news, not too long ago, there's been a lot about a drone company, I think in Italy, too.

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 07:18

Yeah, very cool one that they were driving a drone from Torino, I think the company is called Skyper Sonic, and it was going around over the M1 concor You know, being driven from Italy. So that was very cool. Yeah.

E

Ed Clemente 07:34

Yeah, and, you know, just one this is more of a person I really admired, but Sergio Marchionne, Marchionne, thank you. [Yeah] but did you ever meet him by chance?

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 07:47

A Allegra Baistrocchi 07:47

Oh goodness. Unfortunately, no, that would have been for me really like an aha superstar moment. I would have loved to do that. But no, I didn't. I didn't I get didn't get the good fortune. And he was an incredible businessman, incredible manager. So obviously, you have, we have Fiat here, which you know, Marchionne was the head of and he's sort of the mastermind behind the Fiat Chrysler sort of union. They're now under the umbrella Stellantis, and within the umbrella of Stellantis there's 14 automotive brands, four of which are Italian. So we have Fiat, Alfa Romeo, Lancia, and Maserati. So they're going to be a big disrupter I think, in the EV field. I think they're planning to spend 30 billion by 2025, in sort of EV and electrification softwares and so they're doing some pretty cool stuff in that.

E Ed Clemente 07:59

So it's, they're doing work even, because Michigan, I know, is a big hub for electrification too. So they have some of those operations here even?

A Allegra Baistrocchi 08:46

Absolutely, those four companies each have operations here. [Excellent] I think Michigan is a great place to have it, not only because of its history in the automotive, but because you guys have such great, you know, skilled workforce, you know, great universities, you know, it's a great place, it's a great place to be.

E Ed Clemente 09:04

Yeah, let's, um, I want to mention, I want to get back to you a little bit, though. You've had a fascinating life since even when you were a little kid. And can you tell us a little bit about your lineage, even with the diplomatic corps as a child almost right.

A Allegra Baistrocchi 09:20

Yeah, I am a fourth generation diplomat. So not only my dad, but my grandfather and my great grandfather were all diplomats, so I've basically lived this lifestyle forever. And I think you if you live it as a kid, you either love it or hate it. And I absolutely loved it and I would I really cannot think of a better job in the world. So you know, I've lived all over the world because of it. We were in Washington when I was only three years old, hence my English, not sounding so Italian. And then, you know, after that, we went to Moscow and communist times went to Hong Kong, London. I lived in Thailand. You know, it's, you just get to experience cultures and lives that are really, you don't get it any other way. And that's why I made this choice for myself. And I'm very happy that I get to do this for my kids, because, you know, they get to experience all this. They get to, they get to experience a super fun vibrant Detroit, which I'm very excited about.

E Ed Clemente 10:21

I do want to get to your adult part of your career, but let's I didn't know this. You just brought it

I do want to get to your adult part of your career, but let's I didn't know this. You just brought it up, though, but so you lived in Moscow when it was still under the Soviet Union? [Yeah, '86 - '88] What was that like? Like for food?

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 10:34

I was gonna say it's very cold, but then again, it is in Michigan. So I was prepared. It was interesting, I mean, as a child, you don't really understand the politics behind it. But I definitely think it was something that you know, molded me and informed me and definitely to want to know more.

A

Announcer 10:54

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E

Ed Clemente 11:11

I wanted to mention, what is the Consular Corps to because you're, you said you weren't even here a month and all of a sudden you're an officer for them or something?

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 11:21

Yeah, so the Consular Corps everywhere that you have sort of diplomats, they tend to associate together, because it allows for you to interact, to discuss things that are happening, make connections, etc. So the Consular Corps of Michigan has, we have I think we're six career diplomats here, based out of Detroit, I'm the only European diplomat. So there's six of us that are, you know, career diplomats. And then we have the honorary Consuls that are also part of the Consular Corps and Honor Consuls more, you know, the leading businessmen, lawyers, accountants, whatever they may be, that have some sort of relation with the host country. And so they act as an envoy, but they have less of a, you know, of a services role, but more of a liaison sort of role.

E

Ed Clemente 12:12

Oh, and also, we should get back to you now, again, for a second, but, but you've been stationed quite a few places already, yourself in your professional career, right?

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 12:23

Not as many as I'd like, because I love traveling. But so I when I joined the service, I worked in two different postings within our ministry in Rome. So I was in Development Cooperation in their offices that do project development projects around the world. And then I was actually the

Deputy Chief of Staff for their Secretariat. And then I lived in I was in London for a little bit. And I lived in London previously through different times in my life. So that was like going home a bit as well. And then just before coming here, I was the Deputy Head of Mission in Sri Lanka. So the Deputy Ambassador there.

E Ed Clemente 12:59

Yeah, it's a little climate difference between here and there. [Just a tad] There might be more refreshing here might be too hot there, I don't know.

A Allegra Baistrocchi 13:06

I don't know. I mean, if I have to say the only bad thing about Michigan so far has been that I don't love cold weather. But I mean, if that's the only bad thing I'm going to gripe about, it's not so bad.

E Ed Clemente 13:17

Well, you know, it's funny, you probably don't notice it, but I can tell you've been to a lot of places because your accents not like any other accent. It's your English obviously is better than my English, but it is amazing that because you pick up little words here and there, probably everywhere you've been. And you sort of become this word amalgamation of a lot of different sort of colloquialisms, accents, you know, it's, I could hear a little English and you that's why.

A Allegra Baistrocchi 13:43

Before becoming a diplomat, I also worked in a property fund at a certain point and the CEO with this fabulous British super posh, went to Cambridge, and I would correct his English and he would get so upset. English is your second language. I was like, but is it really? No.

E Ed Clemente 14:02

When you learn something at the high level, it's hard to get out of it. Um, let's get back a little bit to and I just want to say this is you, I'm gonna put you on the spot a little bit, but give us all your names. I was just fascinated when you told me that you have that many names. And even though you know we've call you Allegra, you have several preceding names.

A Allegra Baistrocchi 14:26

So my full name not all of it is on as on my documents because then it's been my whole life writing out my name is Paola Allegra Barbara Claudia Lolita, those are my first names, Baistrocchi Tucci Carassi del Villar, those are my last names.

E

Ed Clemente 14:44

At that point, you probably be too late to fill out the rest of the exam. The, so some more, is there any, you know, you're in a unique position where you've come across all these companies and is there any other things in the companies that are here in Michigan, but you see as like disruptors because you're in the international, you know, geopolitical world, more than any of us are probably here in Michigan, but anything you see on the horizon?

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 15:11

So obviously I said, you know, Fiat and Stellantis, with what they're doing in EV, without it being in Michigan, if I can make a mention of something in Indiana, just because [sure sure no, no] as well, I find it so incredibly cool how Dallara, which is an Italian company that does stuff in the automotive sports industry. Basically, is the sole supplier for IndyCar chassis and IndyLights Series. And IndyCar which is basically as American as it gets, there's a big Italian component. So they're there. They also have an amazing Dallara IndyCar Factory, if you're ever in Indianapolis. So it's really cool that you can go and you can see how cars are made, and, you know, produced, how they're developed how they're designed. So that's very cool. We have so many of the really good companies, auto adjacent sort of industry, which I won't get into because there are too many, and then I'll leave someone out and then I'll forget, and then I'll be in trouble. Um, one thing that Italy is very known for is design. Now, do you know what the three Fs of designer?

E

Ed Clemente 16:25

No, case I get in trouble, I don't want to swear?

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 16:28

Exactly. So it's furniture, food and fashion. So we have a great company in Holland called Haworth and they have, in their umbrella company, a lot of the best sort of design companies for furniture, talking Poltrona Frau, Cassina, they've just bought a company called Luxury Living. They do, for example, all of Versace sort of home collection stuff. So they're absolutely fantastic. We're partnering up with them, and an amazing architectural firm in Italy called Paloma Serafini. So we I have a number of projects in this whole four years that I'm going to be in Detroit, sort of that I want to do stuff with them. They're huge disruptors. IT services we know how important it is. And especially with a pandemic, you know, sort of every sort of connection, we have a great company here called Reply. They do everything from AI to big data, CRM systems, digital communication, e-commerce, so anything that's sort of in the IT space, they're huge. And that's about it. I mean, there's so many that I could mention, but those are sort of the fields that I think that we can take sort of Michigan by storm. There's a lot of other companies that I'm gonna invite to come if you want to hear about that. [Yeah, yes] Sort of in the in the energy field, I want to get Fincantieri here. Fincantieri is the producer of 85% of the world's cruise ships, but they're not only in that space. They're also in the renewable energy, infrastructure space. I want them to come. I want Trenitalia, and Ferrovie dello Stato. So you know, train infrastructure company to come in, I know that there's going to be a big push now for infrastructure in the US. I obviously want to see more Italian food and

wine here. We're the biggest producers of wine in the world and it is the best wine in the world. But that's a personal opinion, not an actual fact. You have great outlets of where you can find food here both as like from a supermarket standpoint, you have Cantoros, Vincent Joe's, you have distributors like you know Carmela Foods, they have some awesome products. I would advise to go with authentic, authentic, authentic Italian, you have some great restaurants. So there's a lot that I want to do in the various spaces.

E

Ed Clemente 18:51

You know, it's funny for Christmas this year, that was, I get on a theme sometimes buying people gifts. And this year was Abruzzi wine, because my family's from you know, Bruzzese. But they, everybody goes oh, wow, we didn't know they made wine, you know, because it's in the mountains. They don't really think of it. But I mean, almost all of Italy makes wine practically, almost everything. Yeah, almost every state does right?

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 19:13

One of the things, one of the companies I want to try to get in is that isn't represented here yet is Terrachevico. So they own 22 estates around Italy in the different regions. And you know, I asked the guy like, can you send me sort of like some suggestions or you're like wine list. He's he's like, we have 1400 different types of wine, so if I send you an Excel spreadsheet, you're just going to go mad, I was like, okay, now just give me two or three suggestions.

E

Ed Clemente 19:39

I can help you there in the future. I was a Liquor Control Commissioner for like eight years.

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 19:44

To drink it, oh, okay, now to actually discuss it, perfect.

E

Ed Clemente 19:47

The business side of it, yes, I think I could get you connected. One other thing I always like to ask the guests is if you could give yourself like a mini commencement or go back and speak to the Allegra in High School, what would you tell yourself, maybe, or maybe you did take the right path, obviously, you know, not everyone goes...

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 20:07

I did, but I would say to myself do it sooner. So I was, you know, being a fourth generation diplomat, there's a, there's a big sort of weight on your shoulders to continue with the tradition and I and I shied away for it for 10 years. And if I had to go back to myself, I would say do the job, do it right away, it is the most incredible job in the world. If I had to give this, you know,

advice to somebody else, I would say do the job. It's the most incredible job in the world. I would like to say this, especially to women. All the women out there that are listening to me, it's an incredibly empowering job. And I think that women for the fact of, you know, the, you know, they're the genteel sex, that they would be that they are very, you know, appropriate for for this type of job. And they're a bit more cautious when they approach it, because that, you know, not a lot of people know about the Foreign Service. So it's very difficult sort of to go, and you know, jump into something that then can take you 1000s of miles away from home, and you don't really know what's going on. So I say, try it, if you're interested in it, I say this also to the men, I'm not just I'm not being sexist about it, I'm just saying, you know, it's it's something that women are very capable in, we are still very underrepresented. It's not just about gender equality, although we like it also to be about gender equality. But it's also because you know, if a woman is part of a negotiation, the PISA core will last longer, and it's in studies have shown it. So if women are out there or men that are interested, look into the Foreign Service, but if you're not into being part of the Foreign Service, and there's so many other things you can do. You can travel more, which is, you know, that is my first thing on my bucket list is always finding a new place to go and see. You can get involved with organizations that open up your horizons and Ed you're better verse in the Global Ties, sort of speech, but and then get in touch. What I would like everybody and anybody that's listening today, go look at our social media, we're Italy in Detroit, we're on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, go to our website www.consdetroit.esteri.it See what we're about. Do you have any questions? Is there anything you would like to know more of, you know, get in touch?

E

Ed Clemente 22:19

Yeah. And, and, you know, I think I wish I would have got that advice, obviously, because I really didn't know that much about, I knew about travel, but I never really knew about, it could be a job, you know, a career opportunity too. And, you know, all my, my folks, like I told you, we had an Italian restaurant growing up. That was it, they expected me to run that place. And you know, there was not much choice, but it's nice. I hope people hear this and hear your message, because I think it's pretty, pretty important. We're at the end, but if you have anything else you want to mention again, or I don't know, you haven't been here that long, I should mention. So you're starting to discover the Midwest, you know, let alone just Michigan. And I imagine, how many states again.

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 23:05

Five, so it's Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee.

E

Ed Clemente 23:10

And I imagine you have a lot down in Tennessee too, I would guess no or not yet?

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 23:14

We do, I haven't gotten out there yet, which is incredibly sad. But I've only been, for now, I've only been here in Michigan and in Ohio, just for proximities sake. But you know, I've only been here a few months. So

here a few months. So...

E

Ed Clemente 23:26

Right. Yeah. Well, anyway, I want to thank again, our guest today, Allegra Baistrocchi, [Baistrocchi] Yes, thank you. I will, I will be punished for never saying your name correctly, probably, but she's the Consul of Italy, at the Consulate of Italy here in Detroit. And we want to thank you again very much for taking time, and being a lot of fun. You did a great job.

A

Allegra Baistrocchi 23:53

Thank you for having me. It was my absolute pleasure. And my only problem that I had with today's podcast is that I am limited in time because as you know, being an Italian yourself, I could go on talking for weeks.

E

Ed Clemente 24:05

Well, we might get another chance to bring you on after you've been here a little while to talk about some of the things you've tried to do. [I would love that] All right. [Thank you] Thanks again Allegra. Join us next week when our guest will be Randy Thelen. He's the President and CEO for The Right Place and you'll find out his path and all the different places he's worked that's now helping out the Grand Rapids region.

A

Announcer 24:26

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