

Annual feast will be a lift

Boat, tower will 'dance' in tribute to a saint

By E.M. GALLAGHER
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

It wouldn't be July in Williamsburg if there wasn't that annual combination of tradition, muscle and mysticism known as the Dancing of the Giglio.

For more than a century, the elaborate ritual in which teams of men "dance" a tower and a boat, weighing thousands of pounds, through the streets of Williamsburg, has been the high point of the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Paulinus.

Last week, members of the committee gathered on the steps of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church on Havemeyer St. just before the final Feast 2001 meeting. Dozens of men and children talked and laughed as they waited to file into the church basement.

They've been preparing since March for the 114th Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Saint Paulinus, which begins Thursday and runs through July 16.

"It honors our religion, the neighborhood, our families. It honors our connection back to Italy," said Sal Primeggia, 57, who has been lifting the giglio (pronounced "jeel-yo") since he was 16.

His parents first brought him to the festival when he was 7 because they wanted him to learn about the tradition, he said.

All the way from Italy

The celebration of the life of



TOBY MORRIS

DRY RUN Decorative boat goes for a ride atop the shoulders of dozens in Williamsburg as part of preparations for the Dancing of the Giglio on July 8. The ritual will be a big part of the 114th Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Saint Paulinus.

Upon his return, the people of Nola gathered to greet him carrying lilies.

The towering structure lifted today is called a giglio — Italian for lily — to symbolize this triumphant return. A statue of St. Paulinus is the crowning element of the 3-ton, 85-foot-tall structure.

Constructed from papier-mache, the flowers, angels and saints that adorn the structure are vibrantly painted, said Nick

Msgr. David Cassato has been the moderator of the feast and church pastor for 17 years. At the last committee meeting he urged the men to carry on the tradition of those who had gone before.

"I don't care what you say — this is the best feast in the City of New York," Cassato said.

"It's a practice of faith," said Benny Mangone, this year's Capo No. 1. "I'm really honored."

The highest honor bestowed upon a participant of the feast is

Girls are on board

For the first time in the history of the church, girls will be capos of the children's giglio this year. Stephanie Galasso and Carla Pennolino, both 10, were lifters last year, but have been promoted to capos.

"I'm excited, but I'm a little nervous," Carla said.

While women in Italy participate in the heavy lifting, in Brooklyn there is no such talk.

Phillip Van Nostrand, who as-

sits a band playing the traditional giglio song, as well as modern tunes.

While the feast is built on tradition, there also is room for newcomers. Brian Lupo, 25, will be the first in his family to lift come July 8.

"I'm looking forward to the camaraderie," he said. "I'm excited to have my family and friends see me lifting."

Love of lifting enticed Sal Mazzatenda, 37, to get a tattoo of the giglio structure, along with the

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All the way from Italy

The celebration of the life of St. Paulinus, a 5th-century bishop, was brought to Brooklyn by immigrants from Nola, Italy, in the 19th century.

The Bishop of Nola, St. Paulinus, allowed himself to be taken into slavery to the East in order to save the only child of a widow, after the youth was captured by pirates.

Hearing of his great sacrifice, the local ruler ordered the release of Paulinus, who then returned to Nola on a vessel provided by his liberator.

Constructed from papier-mache, the flowers, angels and saints that adorn the structure are vibrantly painted, said Nick Ferrandino, the artist for this year's giglio. Each year, the structure is refurbished.

The climax of the feast is Giglio Sunday, July 8, when two crews of about 120 men will lift the giglio and a boat, making them "dance" in the streets.

The boat carries a person representing the generous ruler — called The Turk — who freed St. Paulinus. In years past, representatives of the Turkish government have been honored guests at the feast.

"It's a practice of faith," said Benny Mangone, this year's Capo No. 1. "I'm really honored."

The highest honor bestowed upon a participant of the feast is to be named Capo No. 1 — the leader who coordinates the lifts of the giglio and boat. Mangone has been following in his father's footsteps for the past 40 years, and come Sunday, Mangone said, he will honor his father, a former Capo No. 1.

"For the first lift, I'll lift the giglio off the sidewalk and ask my father to continue," he said. For the other lifts, he said, "I have a couple of things planned."

The lifters will do approximately 25 lifts in four hours.

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Phillip Van Nostrand, who asserts he is Italian despite his last name, is this year's (as well as last year's) Turk. Van Nostrand said with each new person, the appearance of the Turk changes.

"Every year you try to be a little different," he said. "You try to be more elaborate [than the previous Turk]."

A lift parade picks up the major giglio participants at their houses, beginning with the Turk and working their way to the No. 1 capo's house. On the giglio

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Love of lifting enticed Sal Mazzatenda, 37, to get a tattoo of the giglio structure, along with the words "O Giglio e Paradiso" — the song played while men lift the giglio. Coming from a history of lifters — his grandfather lifted in Italy and the U.S. — Mazzatenda wanted a tattoo of something that meant the most to him.

"It's like Christmas in July," said Mazzatenda, who has been lifting for about 25 years. "I love to lift — I just love to lift."

More information about feast times and events is available online at www.olmfeast.com