



PAESANI



## Molise Marvels

Imagine using professional skills to plan your life vision. Educators Scott and Meagan Holcomb did just that in summer 2019, thanks to a grant for which they never applied. In 2019, Molise, Italy's second-smallest region, announced it would pay you over \$27,000 to settle in one of 106 underpopulated villages to start a small business.

"We were sitting outside our dream house in Tucson, Ariz., and really started 'backwards planning' our lives," Meagan recalls, referring to strategy teachers use to plan courses: Asking questions like What are our passions, and where do we thrive?

The couple wrote a curriculum based on their answers, and began building relationships in Molise. When the pandemic hit, "We kept working, and got everything accredited through Northern Arizona University," Meagan said.

In 2021, they went to work full-time as the founding directors of Molise Italian Studies: Adult-Based Study Abroad and Community-Based Global Learning. Their website "Molise IS" emphasizes cultivating curiosity, empathy and resilience.

With partners that include the Università degli Studi del Molise, Northern Arizona University, Study

Abroad 4711, among others, they offer such programs as semester study, summer internship, and Italian language. As their website states: "We strive every day to do better and to be better at fostering an authentic sense of belonging for all." Visit [moliseitalianstudies.com](http://moliseitalianstudies.com).

—Kirsten Keppel



WWW.NIAF.ORG

## Ben There, Done That

After his father died two years ago from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), Ben Coffaro knew he had to do something to help families dealing with the same battle. "I remember what it was like to be in need of expensive medical equipment like wheelchair-accessible vans and my mission is to solve that problem for the next family," he said.

So, the 31-year-old Cincinnati native started a charity, "Chair Force 1 Foundation," with proceeds going to the purchase of vans for families in need. The name comes from a three-wheeled bicycle Ben's brother Sam used as he ran pushing their father in a marathon. "When my dad got sick, it felt like our community rallied in support of our family's needs," said Coffaro, whose family origins are Sicilian. "People came from every direction to help."

He realized then that it was his turn to give back, so he created the charity to focus more on others. Less than one year in, the charity has raised more than \$150,000. It currently has two vans in the fleet and is about to purchase a third. The 2024 goal is to buy five additional vans and expand the reach beyond Cincinnati.

"As we build momentum, we are working toward becoming the go-to charity for anyone battling ALS or other life-changing neurological diseases in the Ohio Valley Region," Coffaro said. ▲

—Jan Angilella



# NIAF's Persons of Interest