



You may know Tony Battaglia from resident groups such as The Villages Musical Theater, Villages Honor Flight and more, but what you may not know is he worked in television for decades and sang wherever he went.



Rachel Stuart | Daily Sun

GETTING TO KNOW TONY BATTAGLIA

Age: 88
Village: Alhambra
Spouse: Randi
Family: Three kids and a stepson
Moved Here In: 2002
Moved Here From: lived in Buffalo, New York, for 32 years, then Bakersfield, California for 20 years
Favorite Villages Activities: Singing, The Villages Musical Theater, Showcase of Talent



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Tony Battaglia grew up in Buffalo, New York, where he proudly went to an all-boys school called Canisius High School.

Battaglia started singing at the age of 9, and his mother told him, "You gotta sing for the family." But Battaglia sang for more than just the family.

"I would've preferred to play football and basketball, not yet knowing how wonderful music and theater is, but I grew into it by joining choral groups and church choirs," said Battaglia, of the Village Alhambra.

By the age of 14, he was taking voice lessons under Karl Kritz, who was a conductor for the Metropolitan Opera, and winning multiple singing contests like Voices of Tomorrow.

In 1953, he was drafted into the military and sent to Korea. He returned in 1955 and studied drama and speech at the University at Buffalo before graduate

school at Syracuse University.

He first went into radio, working at WBEN in Buffalo, which he said was "the best station in Buffalo." After a while, Battaglia decided TV was where it was at and worked at WNYS-TV and WTVH.

Battaglia found opportunities to sing wherever he went, like performing as a guest soloist with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and appearing as Angelotti in a Syracuse Symphony Orchestra production of "Tosca."

In the '70s, Battaglia met Randi through mutual friends. "When I first saw her, I said, 'Oh my god, I've never seen a woman this pretty,'" Tony said.

They got married about five years later, and Tony got a job at KERO-TV in Bakersfield, California.

"California was wonderful at

the time," Tony said. "There was a lot of opportunity to sing."

For instance, Tony was asked to sing at the Dodger Stadium in front of thousands of people, and was a patriotic singer for political figures like Bob and Elizabeth Dole and George H.W. and Barbara Bush during appearances in Bakersfield.

One embarrassing but funny story that Tony likes to tell is the time he and Randi visited Piazza San Marco in Venice, Italy, and Tony got the chance to sing "Torna a Surriento (Come Back to Sorrento)," one of the first songs he ever learned.

"I got up to sing, and I forgot the words," Tony said. "I went, 'da, da, da,' can you imagine doing that?"

In the U.S. when you're singing in Italian and forget the words, you can usually improvise with nonsense words and

no one notices, Tony explained. But not in Italy.

In Bakersfield, Tony also won numerous awards for his philanthropy, such as the City of Bakersfield's "Man of the Year" volunteer award.

He was an active Rotarian, and his club in Bakersfield presented him with a plaque that says, "For Tony Battaglia, who sang 'The Star-Spangled Banner' more than any other."

When the couple moved to The Villages in 2002, they were quickly absorbed into the entertainment scene.

Tony was a regular singer at Church on the Square (now The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center), and Randi started a music group called the Variety Pack. Tony also performed in a group called the Tenors Extraordinaire and appeared in many

resident theater productions of shows like "My Fair Lady" and "Guys and Dolls."

In 2017, Tony decided to partially retire from performing due to health issues. He had a retirement party at Savannah Center that he said drew 600 people and a number of local entertainers he had performed with such as Dawn DiNome, Mary Jo Vitale, Ray Leggiero and more. At the end of the party, Tony got up and sang, "My Way."

Although his performances aren't as frequent, he still sings when he can. He will perform at Showcase of Talent at 7 p.m. Friday at La Hacienda Regional Recreation Complex.

Those interested in seeing some of Tony's performances can search "Tony Battaglia A Sentimental Journey" on YouTube for a 26 minute montage.

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