



A generation of bocce

# Victoria Park

A documentary by Tracey Lebedovich



## About the film

*Victoria Park - A generation of bocce* is a truly independent documentary that tells the unique story of an endearing group of Italian-Canadians who for the past fifty years have shared their zest for life through a common language — bocce ball.

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Production Company: Gloriousday Productions Inc.

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Address: 667 Westhyde Place, North Vancouver BC, Canada, V7N 2Y5

Primary Topic: Cultural Heritage and Community

Genre: Lifestyle Documentary

Length: 42 minutes

Format: Standard definition DV NTSC shot in 24p



## Short Synopsis

*Victoria Park - A generation of bocce* is the story of a group of Italian-Canadian gentlemen who have gathered in Vancouver's Victoria Park to play bocce ball for the past fifty years. These lively and fiercely competitive old-timers are a beloved neighbourhood institution and an important part of the city's living history and culture.

Located in what was once considered Vancouver's thriving Little Italy, Victoria Park, and the surrounding Commercial Drive area, is slowly losing its Italian roots as new immigration from Italy all but disappears. As a sign of the times, the park is slated for major re-construction, leaving the aging gentlemen without their familiar gathering place for months and possibly changing their community's landscape forever.

The film also follows Rudy and Elsa, an endearing Italian-Canadian couple who are still playing competitive bocce ball well into their 70's. Through their love of the game, they hope to somehow attract the next generation of Italian-Canadians to carry on the bocce tradition.

And meet Raymond Culos. Ray is a passionate second-generation Italian-Canadian and local community historian whose quest to retain his cultural traditions has led to him writing four books on the subject and building a traditional bocce court in his own backyard.

Join these and a host of other neighbourhood regulars as they help to tell the story of what could be the last generation of Italian-Canadian bocce ball players in Vancouver.



## Long Synopsis

Shortly after WW2 an unprecedented wave of Italian immigration to Canada took place. From the 1950's up until the 1970's this massive influx of Italians helped to create a vibrant and thriving Little Italy in East Vancouver, BC along a street called Commercial Drive. Italian-owned shops, cafés and restaurants flourished as hardworking new immigrants found their place to call home. Local parks, backyards and numerous hidden Italian “bootleggers” hosted bustling bocce ball games where immigrants could share stories and dreams for a better life in Canada.

And now, some fifty years later, new immigration from Italy is all but extinct, the bootleggers long gone and bocce ball courts few and far between. Many of the original Italian-born immigrants have already passed away, leaving a rapidly shrinking community of first generation Italians.

Tucked away near bustling Commercial Drive lies one of the last remaining pieces of old world Italian charm—a group of Italian-Canadians, many in their 70's and 80's, who continue to gather daily in Victoria Park for a competitive game of bocce ball in one of the few courts still remaining. These lively (and fiercely competitive) old-timers are determined to keep their beloved sport alive regardless of the fact that the next generation of Italian bocce ball players is nowhere to be found. As sign of the times, Victoria Park is slated for major re-construction leaving the aging gentlemen without their familiar gathering place for months and quite possibly changing their community's landscape forever.

It's here in Victoria Park where we'll meet Aniello (Neil) and his somewhat intimidating gang of fellow bocce players. Within a week of his arrival in Canada in 1964, Neil joined with other southern Italian men, enjoying games of bocce in the park in between long days of intensive work for local construction and labour companies. Back in Italy he was a successful tomato farmer and an incredibly skilled bocce player. In Vancouver, Neil had to accept almost any job to support his family, so it was on the make shift bocce court in Victoria Park where Neil could find some respect and companionship with others from similar situations.

Once Neil retired, he continued his visits to Victoria Park on a regular daily basis. In fact most everyone who played at the park back in the 1950's and 1960's has been continually playing bocce there for almost half a century. Every day, starting just after lunch until right before dinnertime, the



men venture out to the park, rain or shine, to play. Some drive in from the suburbs, others walk or arrive by electric scooter. Some men even have their caregivers push them to the park in their wheelchairs. Those who can't physically play bocce anymore slowly pace up and down the bocce courts, following the pallino. Others will crowd around picnic tables playing cards for hours at a time; yelling, arguing and laughing until its time to go home again.

In the spring of 2007, we follow Neil and his fellow bocce ball players as they play their last games in their beloved park before six long months of construction halts their game. How will they spend their summer without bocce? Will they stay in touch? And will they faithfully return to Victoria Park once the changes are made? In a rare opportunity, Neil invites us to watch (but not play) bocce, gives us a tour of his amazing urban Italian garden he's tended for over thirty years, and shares a glimpse into his colourful life as a Canadian with a truly Italian soul.

As we check in with the construction progress throughout the summer, we'll also follow Rudy and Elsa, an endearing couple who are still playing competitive bocce ball well into their 70's. After immigrating to Canada from northern Italy after WW2, their success is easily measured by a room full of bocce trophies (literally), an Immigrant of the Year award and over thirty years of volunteer work for their community. Their story takes us to a much-anticipated indoor bocce ball tournament at Vancouver's Italian Cultural Centre, where Rudy and Elsa fight for the chance to move towards the finals in Ottawa, Ontario. As one of a handful of woman playing a game traditionally reserved for the Italian men, Elsa is considered by many to be one of their community's strongest players. Through Rudy and Elsa's love of the game, and each other, they hope to somehow attract the next generation of Italian-Canadians to carry on the bocce tradition.

And we'll meet Raymond Culos. Ray is a passionate second-generation Italian-Canadian and grandson to some of Vancouver's original pioneering Italian immigrants. Ray himself is a local Italian historian whose quest to retain cultural traditions has led to him writing four books on the subject and lavishing his life with all that's Italian—including building a traditional bocce court in his own backyard.

Through the eyes of these characters and many others that know and love them, Victoria Park takes a light-hearted journey into the lives of an aging group of immigrants who are not only an important part of the city's living history and culture but may very well be the last generation of Italian-Canadian bocce players in Vancouver.





## **Director's Statement**

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to tell simple, honest stories about people and their seemingly ordinary lives. As an independent documentary filmmaker, it's not the famous actors or politicians that inspire me. It's regular, everyday people doing what they can do to make life better for themselves and for others. People that we often overlook and undervalue. People that each of us could find in our very own neighbourhoods, if we chose to look close enough. This documentary is my opportunity to tell the story of a few unknown, but very important Canadians that I see as a cherished neighbourhood institution and an important part of my city's culture.

## **About the Director**

A graduate from Vancouver's Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design, Tracey Lebedovich has over 13 years experience as a Graphic Designer and Art Director for a wide range of clients including Disney, Kodak, Microsoft and Barclays. She has worked for a number of high caliber design and advertising agencies while living in both Vancouver BC and San Francisco CA. Throughout her design career Tracey has received numerous awards for her client work as well as her personal creative work including honours from The Webby Awards, The Addy Awards and New York Festivals Awards. Her design and video pieces have been published in Communication Arts Magazine, Graphis and Computer Arts Magazine UK to name a few. Tracey was also featured in a CBC Radio 3 article entitled "Canada's Next Generation of Creators". Her past work has included multimedia interactive design & advertising, corporate video and short fictional film/video pieces.

*Victoria Park - A generation of bocce* is Tracey Lebedovich's documentary film debut.



## **Production Notes**

Victoria Park is part of an old Italian boys club. Women were not invited to play bocce nor do they visit the men at the park, ever. It took the film's director, Tracey Lebedovich, several weeks of watching and waiting before she was even able to approach the bocce players. She ultimately needed the help of a neighbourhood Italian who had ties to the men at the park. The men take both bocce and cards very seriously at the park and are not interested in outside distractions. Tracey once had to wait under the shade of a tree in the smoldering summer heat for over two hours while her main subject finished his card game before he would speak with her. Slowly, after almost two years of filming, most of the men eventually warmed up to Tracey although to this day she stills finds it somewhat intimidating to approach them on her own.

When filming began, Tracey Lebedovich, the film's director and camera operator, was completely unaware of the pending park construction which ultimately closed Victoria Park for over six months soon after filming began. She soon realized it was a blessing in disguise as it ended up being the perfect opportunity to illustrate how quickly times were changing for the men at the park. Originally the film shoot was supposed to take place over the summer but she ended up following the bocce players story for 18 months.

*Victoria Park - A generation of bocce* is an honest, truly-independent Canadian documentary created with mainly donated crew hours and a shoestring budget. Additional project funding was provided by BC Arts Council and Phoenix Glass Inc.

## **Project Credits**

Tracey Lebedovich - Director/Producer/DP  
Shirley Anne Claydon - Editor  
Megan Sandham - Associate Producer  
Joshua Fehr - Boom Operator/PA  
Matthew Howell - Boom Operator  
Lisa Lebedovich - Still Photographer  
Finalé Edit Works - Mastering

