

# Alfonso Ianelli

Ever wonder about the beautiful statue in our school reading garden? Did you know that the sculptor that designed it was a local artist? His name was Alfonso Ianelli and here is a brief summary about the artist that created this sculpture and many others!

Alfonso Ianelli came to America in 1898, at the age of 10. Later he studied to be a sculptor under Gupton Borglum (famous for creating Mount Rushmore).

From 1910-1915 Ianelli designed posters for the vaudeville acts appearing at the Orpheum Theatre in Los Angeles. During this time and through this work, he had a breakthrough to modernism.

John Wright saw Ianelli's work at the Orpheum Theatre and the two became friends. John introduced Ianelli's work to his father, architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who invited him to work on his Midway Gardens project in 1914. Ianelli's modernist style was very apparent as he created several of the Midway's Sprite sculptures.

In 1929-1930 Ianelli went on to collaborate with architect Ernst Grunfeld on the Adler Planetarium in Chicago. He created several Art Deco-style plaques of the zodiac signs and depictions of the planets in their mythological forms.

Ianelli also worked on numerous exhibitions at the 1933 Century of Progress (Chicago World's Fair), including the Radio Flyer and Havoline Thermometer exhibits.

He opened Ianelli Studios in Park Ridge in collaboration with his wife Margaret. It grew to become one of Chicago's most famous art studios of the time. The studio is located at 255 N. Northwest Highway and is now an Illinois Landmark building.

Ianelli designed many significant interiors for churches and movie theatres, two that remain in operation today: The Pickwick Theatre in Park Ridge and the Catlow Theatre in Barrington.

He also designed the large-scale Rock of Gibraltar relief on the façade of the Prudential Building (now called One Prudential Plaza) in Chicago.

The sculpture in the reading garden was donated by the Babich family in memory of Kate Babich. Kate was an avid reader and loved art. On a trip to Arizona, Kate and her family stayed at the Biltmore Hotel and Kate really appreciated the beauty of the Midway Sprite sculptures. The Midway Sprite was designed by Ianelli for the Midway Gardens designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Each elementary art room has a set of local artist posters and Alfonso Ianelli is one of them. Check them out and learn about your Park Ridge Heritage!

