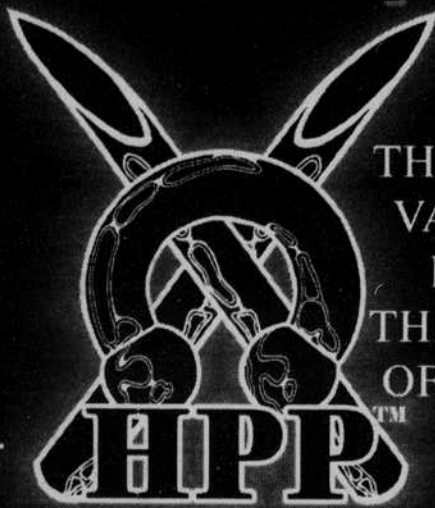


# ★ high priestess piercing ★

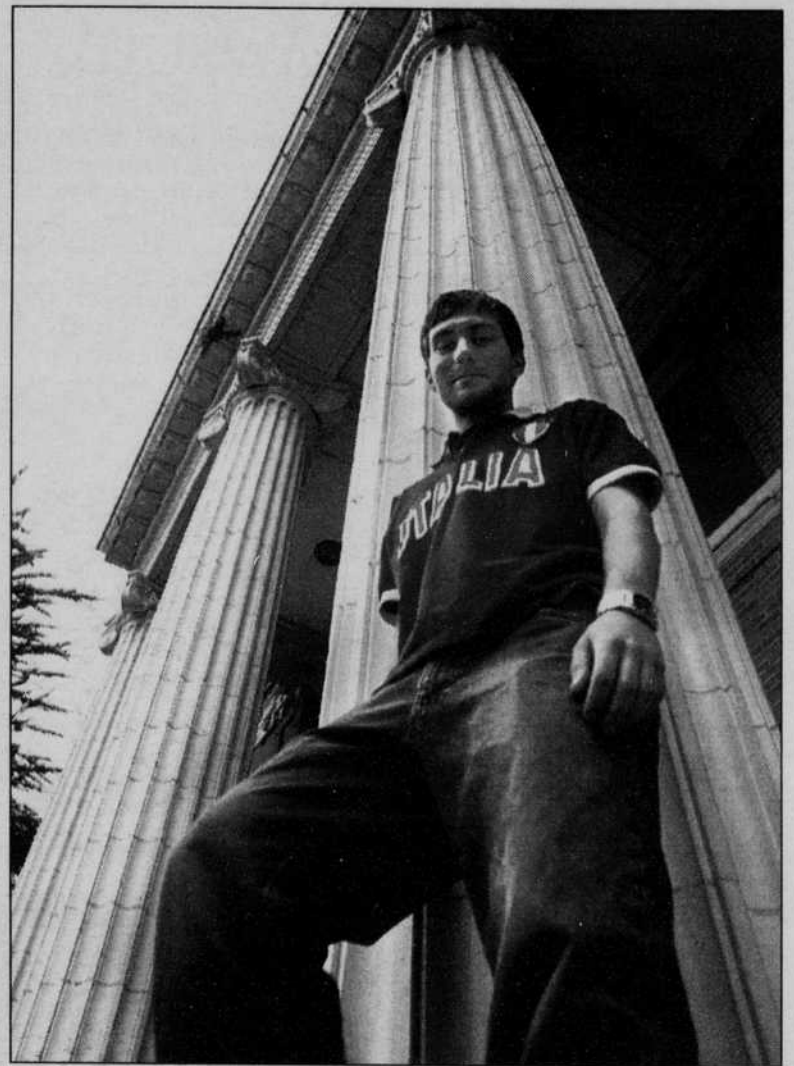
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University student Michael Taormina was one of only 40 students in the nation to qualify for the National Italian American Foundation program, which sent him on a two-week trip to Italy with all expenses paid.

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## TAORMINA

continued from page 1 trip," he said.

Taormina said the best part of the trip was the group he traveled with.

"There are 40 kids in a group, and you have to do everything together, so you have to get to know them pretty fast," he said. "It was a cool experience."

He also liked going with people who know the country.

"It's a happy medium, as opposed to if you had gone by yourself or with a commercial tour group," he said.

Prior to this trip, Taormina only knew about his Italian heritage through his family and relatives.

"Growing up in a small town in Eastern Oregon, you don't get a big Italian community, like in New York," he said.

Taormina recalled an amusing story from his trip.

"Two other students and I had strayed from the group, and we started talking to these three kids," he said. "Suddenly their mother and grandmother came out and dragged us into their house to eat."

Olivo remembers the incident.

"We were in this little mountain town, and we had just exited a church," Olivo said. "There was a long walk through the town to the bus, and Michael and two other kids were literally dragged into a house!"

He added, "I opened the door and there was a table full of food and wine and cheese and kids, and there in the middle of it all was Michael and two other students, stuffing their faces."

Olivo also said Taormina got a lot out of the trip.

"Michael is a shining example of an Italian American," Olivo said. "He was [mature] beyond his years, receptive to the speakers and tour guides. He soaked it up and took it in." Rich Santoro, NIAF Manager of Youth Programs, said applicants have to show an interest in their heritage.

"The goal of the program is to bond Italian American students with their heritage by bringing them to Italy, to show them the roots of where their heritage lies," he said.

More information about NIAF can be found at <http://www.niaf.org>.

Reese Lee is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.



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