

### WILMOT “Days of the Blackbird” FESTIVAL

By Margaret Doodey and Kendel Currier

Photos by Carol Weatherbee

Tomie dePaola — writer and illustrator of *Strega Nona* and more than 200 children’s books, and former Wilmot, NH resident — charmed and delighted young and old alike at the Wilmot Public Library on January 27, 2014. He was kicking off the first-ever *Days of the Blackbird* Festival by reading his book of the same title. The idea for the festival was conceived by Library Director Rosanna Eubank Dude, upon learning the story behind the book.

Tomie explained that the idea for his book began many years ago with his complaining about the very cold weather, one evening late in January, when he arrived at Wilmot’s La Meridiana restaurant for dinner. La Meridiana’s chef/owner Piero Canuto responded by telling Tomie the Italian legend of the “days of the blackbird,” about the last three days of January being the coldest days of the year. According to the legend, white doves hide in chimneys during January for warmth, and emerge black from the soot.

“Thank goodness it was cold that night...and I was hungry!” Tomie concluded. Tomie’s *Days of the Blackbird* book is dedicated to Piero.

After researching the legend, Tomie set his blackbird story in the Piedmont area of northern Italy, with scenery like that of Piero’s



childhood. “The scene outside the library tonight looks a lot like that area of Italy, with the mountains and the sunset,” observed Tomie before beginning the reading.

When Tomie finished reading his book, he had a lively conversation with the adult listeners in the group, describing colorful characters in his family and reminiscing about Wilmot people and events. Led by Rosanna, the children enjoyed creating black and white birds by gluing feathers to cardboard cutouts of birds.

On January 29, 30 and 31, the festival continued with dining at La Meridiana. The birds the children created at the library were hung as decorations, adding to the restaurant’s own blackbird themed displays and special centerpieces. Many area residents enjoyed the special menu Piero created for the festival—old favorites and new dishes—delicious offerings savored by one and all.

At the conclusion of Friday night’s meal, Tomie led the gathering in a toast to Piero, for his inspiration and his fine food. As Rosanna enthused, “This festival is a special celebration of two of Wilmot’s most treasured characters: Tomie dePaola and Piero Canuto. We’re hoping this will become not only an annual tradition, but that it will grow over the years.”

