1. **Short Bio**

Vincenza Cifarelli was born in Matera. She is currently a Postdoctoral Associate at Washington University in St. Louis in the Department of Nutritional Science. Vincenza holds a Ph.D. in Human Genetics from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and a master degree in Bioscience and Biotechnology from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy. Her research has focused on several aspects of type 1 and type 2 diabetes, such as vascular dysfunction, inflammation and activation of immune cells. During her years at the University of Pittsburgh, Vincenza studied the potential role of C-peptide in preventing vascular damage in Type 1 Diabetes. Her research is now focusing on the impact of Type 2 Diabetes and obesity on the intestine’s immune system.

2. **What made you decide to leave Italy and why did you decide to stay in North America?**

The decision to come to United States has been influenced by many factors. I grew up in a family enviroment where studying abroad was highly valued in order to expose yourself to a diverse educational system and culture. My parents have always encouraged my siblings and me to pursue these types of experience. And I do believe that a major component of an education is having the opportunity to experience different research cultures through studying at different institutions. During my last year at the University of Modena, I obtained a fellowship from the University of Pittsburgh to study type 1 diabetes, so I decided to take this opportunity and moved to the US. My first year in the States was extremely positive and rewarding, and so after completing my thesis at the Diabetes Center at the University of Pittsburgh and graduating in Italy, I decided to go back to Pittsburgh to enroll in a graduate program.
3. **How would you define the interaction with the Italian professional community in North America? And with your colleagues in Italy?**

The presence of Italian researchers at the University of Pittsburgh is quite large. I had the opportunity to interact with them on a daily basis in my lab and across several departments. Professionally, I found Italians to be highly motivated and well prepared, and I always enjoyed working with them. From a personal point of view, that interaction gave me a sense of community, balance and stability, which are important when you are spending so much time away from your own country.

The interaction with colleagues in Italy has been very positive as well. When I moved to Pittsburgh I decided to become more involved with the National Association of Italian Biotechnologist (ANBI), collaborating, for several years, as an editor for “Prometeus-Magazine”. That experience has been incredibly challenging, yet fulfilling and exposed myself to interact with several young and dedicated scientists. The goal of the magazine was, and still remains, to discuss about science in a way that is accessible for a large number of people and not only by specialists.

4. **How does one find a balance between working abroad and contributing to your homecountry?**

Although at the moment I am not collaborating with any laboratory in Italy, I will always be prone to contribute to my homecountry. This reflects my vision of the broader impact of biomedical research for society, and the importance of having scientists involved in industry and policy.

5. **What advice would you give to a young investigator making his/her first steps here?**

This is a difficult question to answer since many researchers arrive to the USA with different intents. Professionally, I would say to be strongly motivated and focused: a different language and culture can create discouragement and disappointment at the beginning. On the personal side, I would suggest to enjoy this experience also outside the scientific community and to be open toward the“heterogeneity factor”that is so characteristic of the American culture and society.