

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE 7/2/16

Saluti miei fratelli e sorelle,

Now that the Colorado Indigenous People's Day issue is behind us matters this quarter were not as fever-pitched as before. Even the same issue in the Southampton School District has subsided somewhat. Although the nucleus of Southampton residents that we've recruited has been monitoring the School Board meetings and events in the township very closely, the Columbus Day issue has not even been a whimper there lately. We know that the Board has said that the official school calendar must be set by August, so something will jell soon. CSJ has a meeting planned with the Southampton crew very soon to continue monitoring and planning. We'll let you know.

As usual though we had our mixture of positive and negative developments that have occurred that you should know about. The "History in a Box" presentation still plays to rave reviews, and three more lodges and one children's group has asked me to do the presentation. Thirty-one presentations have been done so far for lodges and school groups, and I will continue to go anywhere in New York State to spread a positive image of our heritage through this program. I love doing it, so those of you who wish to see it please come on board. Relative to the same idea kudos go out to Joe Zingone of the Joe DiMaggio Lodge in District 4 for another whopping annual Italian Language Awards Night in the Wappingers Falls School District! Joe invited me again to attend this year on May 13th when the teachers of Italian awarded 400 students in the district for proficiency in the study of the Italian language. WFSD has 12,000 students in the district, and I'm always amazed at the attendance of so many people at this event. All the stakeholders are there—the teachers, the students, the parents, the school administrators, lodge members, Grand Council officers, and school board members. I always praise them for such eclectic involvement and commend them as a role model for all of us in the state as far as promoting the study of Italian. You'll find hardly anyone better.

On the subject of the study of Italian once again Gene Biancone of the Michelangelo Lodge in eastern Long Island prevailed upon me to encourage the study of Italian in the Westhampton Beach School District at the Middle School level. Gene is unabashedly committed to introducing Italian in this district. We've met with the Superintendent before about two years ago, and Gene set up another meeting with him in May again. Again, the mantra was the same about introducing Italian, but because of cuts already in the foreign language program in the district (namely French and Latin) there's no possibility of doing it now. I urged the Super to at least try a small Italian club, and if that launches, we could try to institute Italian at a later date. He agreed.

However, on a much more hopeful note I am eager to tell you all that I was informed in late May by Lou Del Bianco, the grandson of Luigi Del Bianco, that finally at the 75th anniversary of the monument at Mount Rushmore this year the National Park Service has officially recognized Luigi as the Chief Carver of Mount Rushmore! He will no longer be just lumped with 400 other workers who contributed to the erection of the monument. He will be singled out, and we hope to see a separate monument to Luigi at the site and he included in the tour presentations separately by the NPS docents. It's obvious that the pressure put on NPS by the Del Bianco family, the author Doug Gladstone, and NYS CSJ paid off! Believe me, the Del Biancos are elated beyond belief! Now official legal protocols must be followed by the NPS Director for such a designation to be finalized. We'll keep you posted.

As far as negative developments, I was contacted in May by John Mancini, the Executive Director of the Italic Institute, an organization that promotes Italian history, who briefed me about

a concern regarding the Italian Academy on the campus of Columbia University in New York City. He testified that the IA had strayed from its mission of advancing Italian culture and history for some time and instead was recruiting researchers who presented papers and held conferences on subjects unrelated to Italian culture or history, and most disturbing was the IA still enjoyed its original state tax exemption. To add insult to injury the Board of Guarantors (Directors) did not have one Italian American, and even the Italian government (a financial contributor) was perturbed and frustrated with the Board. Furthermore, the Board had changed the name from Casa Italiana to the IA, no longer allowed the undergraduates at Columbia to use the facility, and dismantled library works on Italian culture and spread them throughout the campus. Thusly, it became obvious the Board was converting the institution from a cultural learning center to a research facility, wholly contrary to the original intent of its founders! Consequently, John and I teamed together and met with State Sen. Ken LaValle who originally proposed the legislation granting tax exempt status to Casa Italiana. We stated our case and requested he propose new legislation withdrawing the exemption unless the IA converted back to its original purpose. He understood, and we now await the results.

Soon after, other irritating issues surfaced in succession. Thanks to John Prisco of the Vigiano Bros. I was alerted in June about a company that manufactured a T-shirt for Father's Day entitled "Touch My Daughter And See if I'm in the Mafia." Immediately, I wrote an e-mail to the company and urged them to stop production. I explained one didn't have to be mafioso to defend one's daughter because ANY father would take a tough stance to protect one's daughter from harm! Battery Park TV, an online station, had written a scathing article loaded with innuendos equating the actions of a Gov. Cuomo Italian American aide with organized crime. I sent a critical e-mail condemning the article as terribly short on facts. The station chief called me and we discussed the matter further. I held my position and told him not to produce articles as these unless he had the facts. In mid-June some members of the Order sent me information on a new movie entitled "Sicilian Vampire" about a mafia don bitten by a bat while vacationing at a desolate hunting lodge, who miraculously is infused with supernatural powers which he uses to retaliate against rival "families." It just shows to what lengths media moguls will go in order to profit from a popular stereotype. Their creativity is so boundless it just boggles the mind! Amazed I sent an e-mail questioning the storyline and suggested that the infected human didn't have to be a Sicilian mobster. It could have been any other evil person seeking revenge.

But the big story this quarter involved Our Lady of Loreto Church in Brooklyn. Having sent a bevy of letters to local elected officials in Brownsville to drum up support for the preservation of OLL, I was informed in late June that the Diocese of Brooklyn had filed an application to the NYC Department of Buildings to demolish the church! A literal flurry of e-mails amongst local community groups, professional preservationists, CSJ, and researchers exploded culminating in a strategy to halt the action. Although papers were filed, it takes about a month to obtain the actual demolition permit, so we knew we had the time to mobilize. I contributed by writing a personal letter to Bishop DeMarzio cluing him in about community efforts to landmark the church and plans for future use and requested he withdraw the application. I contacted a Community Liaison from the NYC Police Department who has connections with the Diocese and is planning on setting up a meeting with the Monsignor who heads the Italian Apostolate of the Diocese to see what can be done. Local community groups are planning a postcard campaign and an online petition drive to urge the Diocese to halt the action. So, we're working doggedly to

keep the church intact, especially since local community interest is growing as more become aware of the landmarking and preservation effort. We'll keep you posted.

Have a great summer!

Fraternally,

Lou