

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE 5/3/15

Greetings My Brothers and Sisters!

Now that the horrors of winter are over we can bask in the sunnier and warmer weather of spring! Hallelujah! While on the sunnier side, I can inform you, leaving off from my last column, that “The Wandering Dago” hit the news. The New York Racing Association and the food truck settled. If you remember, NYRA kicked out the food truck from the Saratoga Raceway in 2013 because of its business name. The truck owners sued NYRA for compensation in lost sales for \$360,000 and settled for \$68,500. However, this settlement is only one phase of the lawsuit, if you recall. The larger issue and our utmost concern is the use of the business name itself as a commercial enterprise. Is it free speech rights or defamation of Italians.? We'll have to be patient and wait and see yet.

Forgetting about serious concerns momentarily, we turned our attention to our annual brunch/dinner fundraiser in February. Led by our effervescent and experienced chairwoman Josephine Morici Cohen, who has chaired this event for all of its 35 years, we honored two titans of anti-defamation and Italian culture, John Fratta and Simona Rodano. John, serving as our present State Treasurer, National CSJ Vice-president, and a member of the New York State CSJ Executive Board, promotes Italian culture with his indefatigable efforts in launching the San Gennaro Feast in Little Italy every single year, and on the other hand fights endlessly against defamation and bigotry against our people, as his titles attest. So, he fulfills both CSJ missions exactly. Simona is a versatile, passionate, energetic artist, producer, actress and singer who stages colorful and striking bilingual stage productions for young charges. Her productions focus on a theme while she engages her audience by teaching Italian at the same time. It amounts to quite a unique production which Josephine and I personally witnessed! We brothers and sisters of the Order should be so proud that these two represent the best we have to offer! Is it any wonder CSJ did so well financially with this event? Grazie mille John and Simona! Concluding the festivities for these two, a brief ceremony was entertained by State President Joe Rondinelli and I for Josephine to thank her for all she has done over the years in making this event a continual success. She is truly indispensable! Thank you Jo!

Back to work, the efforts of our Italian Language Task Force intensified. I made direct contact with Prof. Annamaria Monaco of Suffolk Community College and President of AATI and Carlo Davoli, the Education Director of the Italian Consulate in NYC regarding my constant concerns about student registration for the Italian Advanced Placement Test this year and next. You know that we must have 2,500 students sitting for this exam by May 2016 or else the College Board will terminate AP Italian. I am pleased to report to you that this year 2,993 students are registered. Monaco and Davoli are both confident that we will maintain the necessary 2,500 threshold for next year. Consequently, we will monitor this matter ever so closely to make sure we reach the target next year. Since Prof. Monaco and I have built a strong bond, she invited me to speak to her Italian Club in April about the missions of CSJ. I found her students riveted about our work, particularly regarding our tactics, experiences, and successes in fighting bias and bigotry. To top it off, the Club gave us a donation to show its appreciation! She also invited me to attend the annual AATI Italian Poetry Contest at Old Westbury College on March 20th to observe students in action speaking Italian. Students had to choose an Italian poem, explain the theme in English, and then recite the poem from rote memory in Italian. Middle and high school students on Long Island participated. They were judged on poise, pronunciation, and dramatics in their presentation, quite a tall order for such young students! What a pleasure it was to marvel at the talents of so many in their recitation! Prizes were awarded for each level at the end in general assembly. Kudos to AATI for inspiring such passion and enthusiasm in learning Italian!

Other CSJ members of the Task Force are working doggedly to promote and defend the existence of Italian in our schools. Kudos to Keith Wilson for monitoring Massapequa, Bethpage, Farmingdale, and Plainedge---all have healthy language programs running. Keith, Rosemarie DiChiara and Tom Adamo from the Caboto Lodge in Seaford are persevering so hard to reinstate Italian in Seaford Schools, and thanks to their persistent efforts the superintendent has promised that in school year 2016-2017 he will bring Italian back, and you know we will monitor this promise! Furthermore, if certified teachers in Italian are needed, Prof. Monaco has volunteered to prospect for Seaford in this regard. Jean Gagliardo is refining her proposal to create a program to bond CSJ more closely with teachers of Italian who can bring our work right into the classroom. So definitely we are engaged.

However, our toughest nut to crack is the Utica Schools which this school year terminated Italian. District 6 CSJ Chairman Joe DiCarlo's and my efforts have been rebuffed by a teacher of Italian and a PTA representative respectively. Therefore, I have instructed Joe and his AIAE counterpart Donato Guadagnoli to contact the two middle school principals in the district, hoping we get reactions and some results from them. Generally though, there's some real solid Italian programs around the state, and we will monitor as many of them as we can because they are so instrumental in passing down our culture and language to posterity.

As far as sharing our rich legacy, my "History in a Box" program is doing very well. I have done eleven presentations to date including both schools and lodges. In February I did the Gulotta Lodge and in April I did three Italian classes in a row at Islip High School and the Perry Como Lodge. More are planned, so if anyone is interested, give me a call. I love doing it. In fact, I've added more wrinkles to make it even more interesting.

Continuing on a positive note, our second annual Italian Culture and Heritage Festival is in full swing! We've mailed out applications to close to 100 vendors and 350 sponsors. Our programming is almost finished. We've invited back some returnees and added some new prospects. Simona Rodano is coming to stage her usual lavish production. We're adding a tribute to Frank Sinatra since this year is the 100th anniversary of his birth. We're really trying to outdo last year in order to provide the best and brightest to you of our rich heritage. Mark your calendar: Saturday, June 27th, from 11am to 6 pm, at the Smithtown Historical Society fairgrounds at 239 Middle Country Road (Route 25) in Smithtown 11787! Watch for the publicity.

Adding to our strength, I have recruited some new members to the Executive Board to make us even more effective. Gina Ferrara of the Cellini Lodge is now our new Financial Secretary since Andy Filangeri of the Brumidi Lodge elected to resign to spend more personal time in retirement. We thank Andy wholeheartedly for his two years of service to CSJ. He came on board at a time to help us engage in a very difficult financial transition. Thank you Andy! We've added a real dynamo from Rochester (District 8), Silvano Orsi who was very successful in turning the tide on two defamatory issues from two radio stations (more on those later). Rosemarie DiChiara and Tom Adamo from the Caboto Lodge and Anthony and Nancy Conetta from the John Michael Marino Lodge join the team. All of them are energetic, smart, and tireless in their efforts already for CSJ! We're proud to have them aboard!

In this edition space does not allow me to present you with the latest in our bias and bigotry directory. Look forward for the next issue when I will discuss them at length with you. Stay well!

Fraternally,
Lou