

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE 11/4/15

Saluti ai miei fratelli e sorelle!

I just can't believe that the last quarter of the year is upon us already! I can still vividly remember when we engaged the Holiday Inn Express in Latham regarding its New Year's Eve Mafia Party last January that resulted in the firing of the hotel's management company! So much tumult truly makes the year fly by, and the last quarter was no exception. It was active and festive.

Representing CSJ, Treasurer Joseph Vallone and I marched in the San Gennaro Feast procession on September 12th in New York City with the CSJ banner in tow to show support for this society which does so much to keep Italianita' alive and well in Little Italy as a powerful force. The outpouring of Italian pride was astounding, particularly at the booths along the streets, and we were so pleased to be a part of it.

CSJ also took a prominent role at the annual Hofstra University Conference sponsored by the Association of Italian American Educators (AIAE) on September 20th. Other Italian American interest groups were also in attendance. When I took the podium, I reviewed the missions of CSJ and then proceeded to review some of the positive and negative developments that have arisen lately in which CSJ played a part. I also sold to the attending public the little red booklets entitled "What Italy Has Given the World" written by former CSJ honoree Gaetano Cipolla, which encourages the reader to imagine a world without Italy's legacy. I also set up a display exhibiting our positive image material on Italian icons and accomplishments. I really felt our presence resonated with the attendees since many approached me about the red booklets and bought them.

However, our euphoria was challenged, and wrenching disappointment overcame us when we learned that the infamous New York Daily News printed a historical picture series of the San Gennaro Feast. Inserted within the series were two pictures that had absolutely nothing to do with the history of the feast! One depicted mobster John Gotti arriving at his club in Little Italy, and the other showed a picture of Umberto's Restaurant where mobster Joey Gallo was gunned down. Despite the fact that CSJ has already lambasted NYDN constantly regarding such coverage in their articles, reporters still slog on with deleterious images of Italian criminals. A scathing response to the paper was written by me expressing our continuous exasperation with such reporting! Secondly, the New York Times was no better! Immediately after the death of icon Yogi Berra, a reporter wrote what seemingly was an ode to Yogi about his glory as a baseball star until the paragraph about Yogi's physique was described as "apelike" and "Neanderthal." Once again I wrote a scathing response to the NYT demanding an apology for such action. I'm still waiting. Obviously, we can never relax or lower our guard when it involves print media.

On a positive note, I asked two Executive Board members, Jean Gagliardo and Liz Rizzo, to dispatch letters to all public libraries in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, urging them all to provide some activity or event commemorating Italian Culture and Heritage Month in October. Thanks to District 5 Chairwoman Susan Alicea we were able to obtain contact information for all public libraries in the state and New York City, which we will utilize next year to enhance this effort truly all over the state. Furthermore, thanks to the volunteerism of District 2 Caboto Lodge Liaison Janet Galvin and Golden Lion Editor Salvatore Moschella, we were able to update our Medal of Honor kits with four more new recipients: Jared Monti, Reginald Desiderio, George Ferrari, and Salvatore Giunta. In this regard we also secured another list of recent MOH recipients, and Janet will cull this list for anymore Italian or

Italian Americans to add to our kits. Lastly, thanks to the efforts of Executive Board member Vincent Marmorale and Professor of Italian at Suffolk Community College Dr. Annamaria Monaco-Hernandez we finally discovered who the copyright holder of the “Perlasca” film is—RAI Corporation. I must write the company a letter to seek permission to show this film statewide and perhaps pay a fee. We feel at CSJ that this film is a must for all to see since it portrays a positive image of Italian character during the terrible time of the Holocaust in WW2.

Another quest is on the march! Doug Gladstone, the author of the book Carving a Niche For Himself (about the work of Luigi Del Bianco, the chief carver of Mount Rushmore in the 1930s) and I have been more actively engaged lately in urging the National Park Service to give more prominent recognition to Luigi. Doug has been communicating with Park officials, and I had a conversation with Patricia Trap, the Deputy Director of the Midwest Section of the NPS, the section where the Mount is located. We’re urging said officials to direct the Rangers to mention Luigi as the chief carver in their guided tours with the public, and we want a monument near the sculpture acknowledging Luigi’s work. I was fortunate also to speak with Lou Del Bianco, Luigi’s grandson, about CSJ’s efforts in supporting this quest. Upon Lou’s suggestion I wrote a letter to the NPS Director Cam Sholly, Trap’s boss, to lobby for the causes, which could help him when he meets with NPS officials. Sholly, by the way, seems much more sensitive to our efforts which has buoyed Lou’s hopes for his grandfather. Lou has also met with two NPS historians who recently have investigated this case and both agreed unanimously that Luigi truly does deserve more prominent recognition separate from all others! So, events are moving favorably!

Shifting gears almost immediately, some stirring regarding Our Lady of Loreto Church in Brooklyn surfaced. In the Diocese of Brooklyn Monsignor Alfred LoPinto had met with newly-elected Assemblywoman Latrice Walker representing the area and gave her a tour of the church, promoting the demolition of said church. Countering this effort, Mario Toggia, an avid advocate of the church’s preservation, contacted Walker to encourage her to see his power point presentation on OLL. He then contacted me to urge CSJ to help bolster his effort with correspondence to Walker. In a letter to Walker I stressed the need to preserve such church because it is a source of Italian pride and a testament to the physical labor of Italian immigrants who constructed this church over one hundred years ago using unique cast stone technology, truly a marvel for its time! I also urged her to work with us to gauge the local community and civic groups which could use the building as a cultural or community center. Such a development would be a win-win-win for all involved. The diocese could extricate itself from the issue, CSJ would be enthralled that such an edifice would remain as an architectural wonder in memory of its Italian ancestors, and local groups would have a center that could revive their community. Furthermore, the NYS Landmark Conservancy wants the church preserved, which could definitely help the cause. Stay tuned for further developments.

On another front, because worthy State President Carolyn has created a State Education Committee, she advised me to transfer matters of the CSJ Italian Language Task Force to this Committee. At a meeting held between Grace Ferrara, the Education Chairman, and I such matters were duly transferred. Therefore, any issues regarding education or the Italian language should be addressed to Grace.

Laying aside the usual hubbub of CSJ work, when October arrives, the mood and events turn festive, and what a month for CSJ it was! Dressed in costume as Cristoforo Columbo to bring demonstrative attention to the public about the purpose of Columbus Day, particularly the

unforgettable historical legacy of this great Italian icon, I attended four Columbus celebrations on that weekend. Thanks to artist Bill Castello from the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum I was accompanied with a banner entitled “Cristoforo Colombo, the Discoverer.” The response and attention was astounding wherever I went—Huntington, L.I. (twice), Staten Island, and New York City. Thanks to National’s recommendation, I was invited to partake in a podcast conversation sponsored by DePaul University in Chicago on Radio DePaul. On that podcast I advocated very strongly for the necessity to keep Columbus Day for undeniably historic reasons. That podcast can be found on our website at nyscsj.org. On October 1st the Town of Brookhaven, Suffolk County, proclaimed the month of October Italian Culture and Heritage Month in Brookhaven. Proclamations to National and State officials and Lodge Presidents of Brookhaven Town were distributed. Many of the Town elected officials took the opportunity to describe their Italian lineage and family memories, and of course I used the occasion to describe the missions of CSJ. The highlight of the month though was the Suffolk County Taste of Italy Day on October 29th! The plaza where the celebration took place was decorated with Italian colors, autumn mums and evergreens, the CSJ Medal of Honor display and positive image exhibit, posters glorifying the successes of Italian women, and art works by an Italian American artist. Slide in Italian background music, proclamations to Suffolk County Italian Americans who excel in many fields, scrumptious food by local Italian restaurants, and exhilarating, thunderous Italian American vocalists and one has the making of one sensational experience! At Farmingdale State College I attended a Native American Symposium and listened to a bevy of panelists who decried European arrival on Native American lands. We should now expect this kind of development as a counterweight to our October celebrations, but CSJ will remain ever so vigilant if their efforts should in any way threaten those celebrations or holiday. The month continued with requests for my “History in a Box” program with Vigiano Bros. and Papallo Lodges.

Even young people focused in too! Thanks to the efforts of Anne Marie Mace of the Daughters and Sons of Italian Heritage Lodge I was asked to give a presentation on the history of Italian immigration and the evolution of OSIA and CSJ at St. Joseph’s College in Brooklyn. Thanks to the efforts of Andrea Gallo of the Loggia Glen Cove Lodge I was invited to give three presentations of my “History in a Box” program, at the Bayville intermediate School on Long Island, which now incidentally totals 19 all together!

What a month indeed! Follow us next quarter. SEMPRE AVANTI!

Fraternally,

Lou