

From: Louis J. Gallo, Jr., NYS Chairman, Commission for Social Justice
To: State President Joseph Rondinelli, National and State Officers, Filial Lodge Delegates
Re: Annual Report 2014
Date: May 31, 2014

I personally want to thank State President Joseph Rondinelli for his appointment of me to this prestigious post on June 2, 2013 and for the confidence and accolades he has bestowed upon me this year. I take this position very seriously because both our state officers and filial lodge members throughout this state expect great results, as they should. The work is continuously arduous and time-consuming, but it is very rewarding, especially when we achieve together the desired result.

Our tasks and achievements this year can be classified into two categories that each reflect the missions of CSJ: 1) fighting bias and bigotry against Italians and 2) promoting positive imagery and the culture of Italians through education and public relations. In this manner I have structured this report. There is no need to be as intense and involved as I have been in my plenary session reports and the Justice Column of our Golden Lion newspaper. Therefore, this report provides more of an overview of the year's activity. For those of you who desire a more comprehensive rendition see all my plenary session reports and Justice Columns on our website at www.nyscsj.org

Firstly, when we began the term, we had a very difficult transition. My predecessor was not forthcoming, and so we literally spent the first three months in recruiting members and officers of an expanded, structured Executive Board, appointing some District Chairmen, updating our brochure and website, auditing the books, creating a budget, getting other financial matters in order, moving to a new more centrally-located storage facility, and developing strategies to fulfill our missions all very much so on our own. All these matters took lots of time and diverted us from fulfilling our aforementioned missions from the outset.

Fighting Bias and Bigotry

While engaged in all the above, we were soon tested early and very seriously. Our first major crisis unfolded dramatically and unexpectedly. Adam Haber of Roslyn, running in the Democratic Primary for Nassau County Executive, unleashed a pejorative TV ad against his opponent Thomas Suozzi, an Italian American. The ad actually tried to project the idea that Suozzi associated with Soprano-type characters and once in office they would be set. We mobilized immediately and aggressively. Upon my direction and encouragement emails and facebook posts from the filial lodge base barraged Haber. State President Joe went on Channel 12 News and expressed his dismay of the situation. Two days after the incident broke in Newsday Haber apologized and dropped the ad. The next day his campaign manager resigned. Such a massive effort all together by the members of our OSIA turned the tide suddenly. Score one for OSIA and CSJ!

Soon after, another serious crisis emerged. Two young Italian Americans in Schenectady County were selling a “dago” and “polack” menu on a rambling food truck known as the “Wandering Dago.” It attracted much attention in the media, and New York State kicked the truck out of Saratoga Raceway and the Empire State Plaza, a complex of state government buildings, because of vociferous complaints about the name on the truck. The truck owners subsequently sued the State for breach of their first amendment right of free speech.

We immersed ourselves into the crisis right from the beginning. We again ignited our lodge base and our Executive Board, encouraging them to write the usual emails and facebook posts. Members of the Gabriele D’Annunzio Lodge attended city council meetings and spoke to the mayor about the situation. Mike Santo, our Counsel, attempted to negotiate with the owners to drop the title, but they refused. We urged the Schenectady County legislators and the Schenectady City Councilmen to intercede to withdraw their food permit, but they said unless there was an imminent threat to public health with the food, they wouldn’t intercede. Besides they also said that since the case is in litigation, they wouldn’t intercede anyway. Today we still await the court’s decision on the breach of speech case which is so monumental that if the court should side with the owners, a whole plethora of such ethnic slurs as commercial free speech will dot our land.

Another ad that was released to the public was sponsored by Ally Bank which entailed a prospective customer’s concern about no hidden fees for their online banking service. The ad then showed flashbacks of the customer’s life which revealed that his father was connected to the Mob. His concern with no hidden fees might somehow reveal the sordid past of his father. We felt there was no need for such a commercial about the Bank’s pride in no hidden fees. Once we got involved corporate officials dropped the ad and apologized.

Once Columbus Day 2013 arrived a whole flood of critical assaults on Columbus’ legacy and achievements poured forth, and I spent lots of time putting out the fires. First Mayor-to-be Bill DeBlasio started the onslaught at the NYC Columbus Day parade that showed his knowledge of history was wanting. My lengthy response to him was not answered. Two periodicals, The Trentonian in New Jersey and the Mamaroneck Review contained biting articles that ignited a response from me. Both were sent the National CSJ Report “Columbus: Fact or Fiction” that set the record straight. The same copy was sent to all Board members to equip them with the knowledge they need to combat these distortions so we’re all better prepared. Since this fight totally absorbed my time, I felt I had to create another method to combat so many powder kegs at one time. So, I created the Truth Squad and Response Team of the Board which is to respond in a moment’s notice and address the issue singularly or in small squads. In this manner we can do lots at one time as these incidents emerge and be very effective without losing time and impact.

However, the most wrenching commercial of all thus far was the Aflac Corporation ad “Family Business.” Despite all our attempts and collaboration with national Italian groups, Aflac continues to ignore our pleas and actions and run this ad. The Board has urged me to continue the fight, and so I will re-contact my national associates and determine another plan. Stay tuned for further developments.

Turning our attention to TV series and the movies, there was enough to get excited about. Two movies over the winter were released that were abominable in how they portrayed Italians. “Family” starring Robert DeNiro and Michelle Pfeiffer depicted Italians with uncontrollable sadistic urges that literally maimed people if anyone should cross them. “Don Juan” depicted a young Italian American porn freak hellbent in scoring with sexy, dissolute chicks. Add in the new TV series “The Capones” and “New Mob Wives” and you have a sampling of how media and movie moguls portray us to make a buck. In the spring we were introduced to the movie “Rob the Mob.” Here the usual story is reversed whereupon two characters have the bright idea of

shaking down the mobsters, but in the end the Mob prevails and the two are eliminated. It is truly amazing how low these Neanderthal producers will go to tickle the fancies of the moviegoing public to bring in the dough.

This genre is the toughest for us to tackle. Usually we do not know of these series and movies until they hit the airwaves, and by then it's just too late to eradicate them. We don't have a bevy of lawyers nor a bulging money vault to take them on. It's also very difficult for NYS CSJ to tackle such productions which run nationwide. We literally need a strong National CSJ to be the guiding light against this genre with the states acting as supportive satellites.

We have decided to take on "New Mob Wives" since the producer is a local, and the Staten Island Advance practically acts as the show's publicist with constant articles and stories about the show. We will also recheck the Capones since there is an interest and concern amongst lodge members. Our Media Monitor Angela DeCosimo has a report in waiting for the Board regarding the "New Mob Wives" program. So, we anxiously await her recommendation.

To aid our effectiveness in this cause I have opened channels with other Italian groups and one religious group. The idea is if we strengthen our bonds with each other, we would all be more effective in combatting stereotyping and defamation and advancing our cultures. An attack on one of us is an attack on all of us! As one has noticed we honored Arba Sicula at our annual dinner dance, a group that promotes the Sicilian language, history, and literature. I've attended events sponsored by AATi (American Association of Teachers of Italian) and AIAE (the Association of Italian American Educators). AATI invited me to a spectacular children's bilingual dramatic stage show at the Queen's Theater in Flushing Meadows called "Sempreverde" (Evergreen). With colorful costumes, athletic acrobats and aerialists, videos, and strobe lighting, the grammar school students were asked to participate in English and Italian. The theme of the show was to protect the environment, recycle, and minimize waste. All together it was quite an interesting way to advance a message! Furthermore, we will be planning a program in September 2014 with these teacher groups that advances the Italian language program.

I've personally met with officials from B'nai B'rith, and we are planning to show the film "Perlasca" about Giorgio Perlasca, an unsung Italian hero who saved 5,000 Hungarian Jews through crafty trickery, diplomacy, corruption, and outright bribery during WW2. All of you must see this film! It is a true testament to a human savior and will make you proud to be Italian!

Positive Imagery and Promoting Culture

This mission is very enjoyable and satisfying. Whether it's mailing or distributing our positive image material to the teachers of Italian, lodges, public libraries, or at events, one feels that there is interest in our culture and history that educates the public on our Italian heritage, which could of course act as our best defense against negative stereotyping and defamation. Working hard to sustain the Italian language and making cultural presentations in our schools hopefully extends this same interest to our younger generations, which will hopefully perpetuate our culture for all posterity. Developing strong foundations in this regard will allow our culture to blossom and thrive through the ages. This ideology pervades our CSJ Board and the activities thereto.

To wit, we opened the term with a visit to St. Clare Elementary School in Staten Island in June 2013. Thanks to the incipient efforts of National CSJ President at the time Tina Haemmerle, District 3 Chairman Tony Corsello, Capodanno Lodge Liaisons Frank Cicero and Carl Ciaccio, and with the attendance of State President Joe Rondinelli and me, we presented the school \$1,000 from the District 3 treasury to sustain its Italian language program from K to 6th grade. Shortly thereafter, the Executive Board of CSJ matched the offer with another

\$1,000. The money was used to purchase instructional materials for the program. School officials and teachers were so elated that we were invited back in April 2014 to meet both parents and students. Before the parents Tony Corsello introduced them to our various positive image materials such as posters and bookmarks on Italian icons, history, and culture. Before the 6th graders I followed up Tony's presentation with my "History in a Box" program which demonstrated to them that they are surrounded by Italian innovations and inventions in their everyday daily life.

In fact, this "History in a Box" presentation has been performed six times thus far before lodges and schools. Besides St. Clare it was done before the Columbus Lodge in Farmingdale, Westhampton Beach Middle School, Parkway Elementary School in East Meadow, the Donne D'Italia Lodge in Lindenhurst, and the Luigi Pirandello Lodge in Fresh Meadows. It's a program that resonates with all viewers and participants because it evinces the relevancy of Italian culture in our own present culture and is done in a very visual way. Any other lodges and schools that are interested can contact me, and I would be enthralled to do it!

Carrying this energy further, I made a presentation at the June 22, 2013 annual Wreath-Laying Ceremony at the Most Precious Blood Church in Little Italy to celebrate our OSIA founding. My subject was two Italian icons, Mother Cabrini and St. Francis of Assisi. I always felt that such an event lent itself to the commemoration of these two patrons of our Order. I presented an expose' of their lives and showed how much of an impact they had on Italians and Americans.

In August 2013 CSJ teamed up with the Grand Lodge to co-sponsor Italian Night at the Long Island Ducks game in Central Islip, L.I. with a contribution of \$1,000. Almost every inning the Grand Lodge and CSJ logos were displayed. We also set up a table with the State Membership Committee distributing our positive image materials to fans. In addition, the same was done by District 7 Chairman Carmine Federico at an Italian Night in August at the Syracuse Chiefs game. Attendance at these games is a great way to introduce CSJ to the public.

In September we continued our public relations with a display of our materials at the Hofstra University Italian Culture Festival, thanks to the efforts of Caboto Lodge Liaison Mona Splendore and Board member Liz Rizzo. In the same month Board member Vincent Marmorale informed us that his documentary "Saving the Jews in Italy During WW2" was now completed. We hope to eventually show you this memorable classic, and now Vin is abstracting snippets of the movie to be distributed to teachers of Italian in the schools.

In October 2013, Italian Culture and Heritage Month, District 1 Chairman Charlie Lucie and I presented a tribute to Italian American War Veterans at the Sachem Public Library in Holbrook, L.I. The film on the twenty-four Italian recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor was shown, but the highlight of the program was the uplifting testimonials offered by ten invited Italian American war vets regarding their war and service record. In the same month I was invited by Dr. Arthur Flug of Queensborough Community College to attend his seminar with interns learning about bias and discrimination first-hand. It was my function to instruct students on how non-profit ethnic groups address bias and discrimination. The session went so well that now Dr. Flug wants me to attend these sessions every semester. It's a fabulous opportunity to mold young adults on these subjects and hopefully then transform the next generation and create better inter-ethnic and inter-racial relations in this country.

In November we were alerted with a scare that threatens our capability to advance our culture and promote positive imagery. Thanks to the efforts of the teachers of Italian in the Greece School District in suburban Rochester and District 8 Chairwoman Jennifer Rube', we learned that the district was interested in cutting Italian in Olympia High School in the 7th grade. The alarm is that if one cuts the feeder programs in the lower grades there eventually will be no advanced classes or AP program in the upper grades and districts could then cut the Italian

program all together! We mobilized quickly and immediately. From my computer I organized the teachers, the residents, the Vincent Lombardi Lodge, and a member of the school board who supported our cause, and at the November 20, 2013 school board meeting the Board decided to re-instate Italian at Olympia High School in the 7th grade! It was our greatest achievement this term.

However, now I'm just told that the school district does not want to introduce Italian at its Odyssey High School despite demands by students and parents to have Italian. They would rather introduce American Sign Language (ASL)! So, we have another fight with them over this issue now, and so I've already mobilized the same groups to perform again to change the school board members' minds. We'll see what happens.

The same problem has emerged in Islip High School in April 2014. Thanks to President Joe Franzone of the Marconi Lodge we learned of this problem, and in no time flat I've already met with Islip school officials and requested that they hold the Italian program as is this year and that I would meet with the teachers of Italian to do a recruitment campaign for the upcoming year to bolster enrollment. The teachers have informed me that at the last budget hearing no cuts to Italian were mentioned, and I've already met with the teachers to begin this recruitment campaign. Stay tuned for this development.

I've also learned that Oyster Bay, Uniondale, and Massapequa school districts have already cut Italian. These circumstances have now urged me to contact Margaret Cuomo, the Governor's sister, who a few years ago along with her mother Matilda began to create an Italian Language Foundation which would underwrite Italian in schools in the state by paying the teachers and purchasing instructional materials and thereby taking away the pressure to cut because of budget constraints. But because of the Great Recession of 2007-9 their efforts were halted. My writing to her now is to discover whether she is or will be revitalizing this Foundation, for as one can discern it is needed now!

Concomitant to this effort, our Recording Secretary Keith Wilson has launched a survey of Nassau County school districts to request of them the status of Italian in their districts. We will do the same with Suffolk County, and we request that members of the Order be vigilant of this crisis and inform their district chairman or a CSJ Board member of any latest developments. We have to react immediately if we are going to have an effect early on. With regards to the Nassau County survey some districts have admirable programs including AP and actually state that they do not plan any cuts! Thank God for these forward-looking districts!

On a more positive note, I received an email in March from Dr. Mario Mignone, the Director of the Center of Italian Studies at SUNY Stony Brook about a construction project in City Island, the Bronx. The Italian Hospital Society is seeking a variance before the NYC Board of Standards and Appeals to allow an Italian senior citizen housing complex which would create an environment suffused with Italian culture in the complex till the day the residents died. Along with many others, we were asked to weigh in and help to obtain the variance. I urged members of our Board to write along with me, and we anxiously await the city board's decision. It surely represents another mode to advance the positive imagery of our culture.

While mentioning "culture" it should be known that CSJ is sponsoring an Italian Culture and Heritage Festival on Saturday, June 28th, at the Frank Brush Barn property in Smithtown. Working with District 1 lodge representatives, we are creating a true smorgasbord of Italian culture—an Italian car show, popular Italian songs and arias, mandolin orchestra, writers, a filmmaker, a wandering accordionist, lodge membership tables, our charities, a food piazza, market square, a farmers' market, and more. We're all so excited about the potential of this affair! Come! By the time you leave, you will be a very proud Italian indeed!

All of the aforementioned could not be possible or successful without the dogged determination, love, and dedication of our Executive Board. We've structured our Board through

a division of labor that allows each member to literally own a piece of the rock. For these reasons our meetings are long but suffused with passion as I act as referee and coordinator. CSJ is truly blessed with a cavalcade of competents—our officers Keith Wilson, Joe Vallone, Andy Filangeri, and Counsel Mike Santo; our district chairmen Charlie Lucie, Lee Cerullo, Tony Corsello, Mario Cermele, Susan Alicea, Joe DiCarlo, and Carmine Federico. Sadly in April we lost a real CSJ dynamo, our District 8 Chairwoman Jennifer Rube'. She was CSJ in District 8 period! The rest of our Board members each have a specialty that adds to the competency of our operation—Nat Mannino, Vinnie Marmorale, Josephine Morici Cohen, Liz Rizzo, Angela DeCosimo, Eleanor Jobbagy, John Fratta, Rocco Lanzilotta, Leo Cimini, Terry Tanzer, Stella Grillo, Jean Gagliardo, and Tina Haemmerle. Thanks one and all!!

Besides this Board operation it should be noted that I am working assiduously to create a solid grass-roots organization statewide. I am traveling around all districts meeting personally with presidents of lodges, deputies, and district chairmen to encourage this effort. They have been charged by me to recruit lodge liaisons who act as our infantry at the community level. These liaisons are to make contact with schools and libraries in their respective districts, which are interested institutions that will promote our culture. They are encouraged to assess the status of Italian language programs in their districts and to be vigilant about its ongoing status. Their vigilance also extends to their awareness of bias and defamation against Italians in the print, broadcast, and social media and to report it to their respective district chairmen who would then funnel the issue to the Executive Board for review and action. Finally, district chairmen and liaisons are encouraged to engage in public relations of positive district events so as to convince the public we are more than just these popular pejorative stereotypes. The work is constant vigilance and involvement, but it makes CSJ an integral dimension of OSIA. If having read this paragraph and you are interested in being a lodge liaison, contact the president of your lodge and express your interest in accepting the position. Your president should then contact the district chairman and have you come aboard. Please join us! We are only as strong as the commitment we make, and we'd love to have you.

SEMPRE AVANTI!