

## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE 2/6/15

Saluti Fratelle e Sorelle!

Since the end of the last quarter, CSJ has plunged headlong into a host of issues and activities, as usual. During Heritage and Culture Month in October we did our part in sponsoring a theatrical production "The Class of Life" in conjunction with the Columbus Lodge at the Farmingdale Public Library. This show is written, produced, and performed by Paul Failla of Miller Place and portrays his life growing up in an Italian household and his love of his former occupation as a Suffolk County Police officer. Many of our lodge members are so riveted to his performance because they can relate to the same experiences. It was also a great way for CSJ to kickoff Columbus Day weekend. Shortly after this show CSJ launched the first showings of the film "Perlasca," a true story about an Italian meat vendor for the Italian army during WW2, Giorgio Perlasca, who witnessed the torture and brutality against Jews that he launched his own one-man Machiavellian campaign to save 5,000 Hungarian Jews through outright bribery, corruption and crafty diplomacy. Today Israel calls him one of the thirty most Righteous Gentiles in world history, which truly exemplifies the pinnacle of positive imagery of Italians! CSJ will show this film all over the state so that as many of our lodge members can see and enjoy this fabulous Italian icon. It has already been shown in District 1 (SUNY Stony Brook) and District 2 (Farmingdale Public Library). Our next stop is District 3. Stay tuned. You will not be disappointed and please attend!

While on the subject of films, I hope you saw the movie "Unbroken" during the holidays directed by Angelina Jolie. Once again, we have another positive image film, and this time the focus is on an Italian American stalwart, Louis Zamperini, who faced ethnic slurs as a young teen, rose above them to become an Olympic athlete, enlisted in the army during WW2 and endured a 47-day ocean drift when his plane crashed into the sea, and subsequently was captured by the Japanese. From then on he was subjected to brutal torture for two years. After the war he faced PTSD and had a hard life. Encouraged to attend a Billy Graham Crusade in 1949, he had an immediate Christian conversion, traveled back to Japan, and forgave his former captors. The ordeal was truly a triumph of the human spirit and redemption against horrific adversity. Please see this movie! We must do our part in supporting filmmakers who show the best of our character versus those who show us more negatively.

During Culture and Heritage Month I also personally witnessed celebrations sponsored by a few municipalities, and they seem to be engulfed in the excitement too. On October 27th the Westchester County Legislature held a proclamation ceremony commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Antonio Meucci Lodge in White Plains. The legislators also added a recognition exercise honoring teachers of Italian and their students from all the high schools within Westchester County. On October 29th County Executive Steve Bellone of Suffolk County sponsored for the very first time "A Taste of Italy" featuring sumptuous Italian cuisine from restaurants in the Smithtown/Hauppauge area and invited the leaders of our Order to attend, who all received proclamations personally from Bellone. On November 21st I was invited to critique the first ever Staten Island Culture Festival. All felt it was exciting enough to continue next year. I again stressed the necessity of displaying Columbus much more prominently in the advertising and at the festival to enliven and protect his legacy. I commend these municipalities for keeping our heritage alive and we must support them to encourage them to continue.

Just before the holidays we received some bittersweet news. On one hand author Douglas Gladstone who has written a book about Luigi Del Bianco, the chief carver of Mount Rushmore, and who continues to encourage journalists and elected officials to acknowledge Del Bianco's work, was fortunate that the National Park Service, which supervises the memorial, ordered

sixty copies of his book, but for some odd reason did not offer the book for sale in its shops. The matter has been referred to National for further review, and so the frustrating saga continues. On the other hand, if you remember some time ago I notified you of the developers of a senior citizens complex located on City Island, the Bronx, which would surround its residents with Italian culture, had applied for a variance with the city to build the project. CSJ supported the developers in their quest, and I am elated to report that the city granted the variance, but also reduced the size of the complex. Be that as it may, we can be proud of such a unique enterprise for senior Italian Americans to enjoy in the future!

We can be proud of something else too. My drive in creating a solid grass-roots CSJ in our districts is now starting to pay handsome dividends. District 8 Lodge Liaisons are committed to a promethean research project with middle and senior high school students who have to interview an Italian immigrant and discover his or her story. District 1 is crafting an essay contest for these same students and has decided to lead the Order nationwide in a "Save Columbus Day" petition drive involving our filial lodges and the public for those who do not have the internet. Furthermore, led by Liaison Dan Calise of the Brumidi Lodge, it has been discovered that as our churches consolidate and close due to budget constraints, some very precious Italian art treasures are stored away. The concern of course is for their preservation. Letters have been sent by Dan to Cardinal Dolan and the Congressional Italian American delegation in Washington to pay heed to this matter. District 2 is preparing for its upcoming Bella Lingua Awards program for high school students. District 3 will be hosting the next Perlasca film showing. District 7 led by Carmine Federico of the Progresso Lodge in Syracuse has just supplied the Onondaga County Historical Association with positive image material for its display on Italian immigrant history in the area that will run until March 15th. Chairmen, you're doing a great job spreading our heritage and culture into your local communities!

While on the subject of district successes, I must take the time to single out District 6 led by Chairman Joe DiCarlo and Gabrielle D'Annunzio Lodge President Peter Sparano for their utmost vigilance and perseverance regarding a case around Christmastime. They both heard a radio commercial that the Holiday Inn Express in Latham (just outside of Albany) was hosting a Mafia Party on New Year's Eve with special offers and discounts. Members of their lodge and other Italian groups in the area were mobilized to make protest calls even before CSJ was involved. The calls did force the station to drop the Mafia theme of the party. When CSJ was finally asked to get involved, I immediately contacted the General Manager Todd Hanlon who was not very forthcoming about any changes. When it was discovered that the hotel was actually advertising a Mafia party on the internet, I fired off a letter to corporate and the franchise owner James Morrell. In a return letter to me he profusely apologized, which I requested, and said he fired Hanlon and his whole management company from the hotel! Score this one for CSJ!

Soon after, we were alerted to another crisis. Thanks to Lynn Marino of the Cellini Lodge and Southampton resident Joan Tutt we found out that the Southampton School District was going to eliminate Columbus Day from the school calendar next year. Springing into action immediately, I called the Superintendent Dr. Scott Farina, who told me that the district was NOT eliminating Columbus Day, but because of a later Labor Day and a spread-out Easter and Passover in the calendar next year, it was difficult to schedule the state mandate of 180 school days and snow days, and so it was suggested to have the students in classes on Columbus Day. I told him that would not be acceptable to the Italian American community and another day should be found. Since the school calendar was only a draft, he invited me to make a

presentation before the School Board to state our case. I then decided to mobilize our CSJ Board, the Knights of Columbus, the VFW, and Southampton residents to attend said meeting and show support for me. However, before the meeting took place, I received a call from Dr. Farina who told me that he did find another day and the students would have the day off! Score two for CSJ!

Prior to the above cases, a rather disturbing incident occurred during this year's election campaign regarding defamation of Italian Americans. On the "Morning Joe" (Joe Scarborough) show a political analyst was offering his assessment of the Grimm-Recchia Congressional race on Staten Island. Michael Grimm and Dominic Recchia are Italian Americans. Chuck Todd, a guest commentator on the show, suddenly interrupted and blurted, "Oh, that's just a fight between two mob-warring families!" Scarborough, visibly stunned, peered into the camera and told the audience he disassociated himself from that comment. He then turned to Todd and expressed his incredulity about the comment. The Italian One-Voice Coalition and CSJ pounced on Todd immediately and flooded him with e-mails in protest. On a subsequent "Morning Joe" show Todd publicly apologized and wrote to me that he should have known better. Score three for One-Voice and CSJ!

Despite these disturbing incidents that wrack our sensibilities, there are positive occurrences as usual too. We just discovered that the New York State Racing Association and the "Wandering Dago" food truck just settled. If you remember, the NYRA kicked out the food truck from the Saratoga Raceway in 2013 because of its business name. The truck owners sued the NYRA for compensation for \$360,000 in lost sales and settled for \$68,500. However, such a settlement broaches the subject of whether the owners are primarily suing for just compensation and therefore subordinating their interest in free speech rights in the use of the label "Wandering Dago." We'll have to wait and see. There's more lawsuits pending. The Italian Language Task Force created in November is now in full swing. Contacts have been made by Force members in Massapequa, Islip, Seaford, and Utica school districts regarding the promotion of Italian in our schools. We are awaiting word from our contacts for information. I met with Prof. Annamaria Monaco of Suffolk Community College and we decided we will monitor the numbers for those students taking the Italian A.P. exam this year. Jean Gagliardo, our Culture chairwoman, will be making plans for us to connect with teachers of Italian more closely as far as curriculum and materials. On January 6th the Figli di San Gennaro Board of NYC which runs the annual Feast donated \$5,000 to CSJ from its proceeds! We are so thankful to National CSJ VP and Board member John Fratta and District 3 State Trustee Ernest Magliato for being instrumental in engineering the donation! We truly need it to update and supply our inventory of positive image material and Medal of Honor kits, to provide the monetary awards for the district essay contests, and to prepare for our second annual Culture Festival in Smithtown. As far as the festival is concerned, the Committee has been meeting since September to focus primarily right now on raising money. We have already mailed out applications to ninety-two vendors and will be sending out more. I have contacted the Smithtown and Huntington Chambers of Commerce and both have agreed to help. More Chambers will be contacted. I'm also working on a grant from Wells Fargo and have targeted others for same. Efforts have also begun on preliminary programming. We want certain returnees and other new prospects are being considered. In every respect we promise you an even better festival than last year!

So, as one can see there's never a dull moment for CSJ, and we're always motivated by our adopted motto "Sempre avanti" which keeps us all trucking along! Stay tuned!

Fraternally,  
Lou

