

Chairman's Message 2/6/14

Greetings My Brothers and Sisters!

I hope you're having a happy new year so far. As the new year unfolded I automatically became very pensive about what long term goals CSJ should strive for now that our transition from the previous administration was fully complete. I settled on three: 1) create a solid relationship together with other ethnic and racial groups to combat deleterious discrimination and stereotyping 2) create strong, durable positive image programs to offset negative imagery of Italians in print and broadcast media and 3) make CSJ more well-known to the general public. I promptly then sent out an agenda to all district chairpersons, the Executive Board, and state officials, which will become our blueprint and touchstone to follow in the coming year that reflects these goals.

This agenda focuses basically on the district chairpersons and liaisons to act as the eyes and ears of CSJ right down to the local level. District personnel should meet regularly and discuss the minutes of the Executive Board and adapt CSJ activities at the state level to the local level. Any negative imagery or stereotyping should be reported to the District chairman and then forwarded to the Executive Board for action if any. Personnel should also develop a strong bond with two institutions at the local level---the public library and the schools, particularly the teachers of Italian. Here these facilities should be encouraged to promote Italian cultural and educational programs and publicize them to the general public or through social media. In this fashion CSJ becomes an important spoke in the local community wheel, and hopefully the public would then appreciate Italian culture, or maybe even join a lodge as regular or social member.

Once the agenda was distributed CSJ went into action. The last complete act of our transition was the recommendation of the sub-committee of Leo Cimini, Jean Gagliardo, and me regarding our new storage facility. We settled on A Space Place on New Highway in Farmingdale, and the Board approved it. It's much more centrally located for Board members, and we are saving \$53 per month with insurance in comparison to our old facility in Freeport. Thank you Leo and Jean for all your hard work in this endeavor! Thanks to CSJ District 5 Chairwoman Susan Alicea we organized a meeting in Garnersville in Rockland County with lodge presidents and deputies. I focused my presentation on developing a strong district grass-roots operation, providing guidelines for liaisons regarding their responsibilities, and encouraging all to convince students of Italian to take the Advanced Placement Italian program. District 5 lodges do not have liaisons, so Susan's main task right now is to urge all lodge presidents to select liaisons for the district, find a meeting place, and focus on the agenda I set out for all district chairpersons I described above. Good luck Sue! At this meeting I approached NYS Scholarship Chairwoman Michelle Ment and suggested we work together to sustain a strong AP program and do our part to keep it alive. Overtures have been made to District 6 Chairman Joe DiCarlo for a meeting with liaisons there. Arrangements are also being made to use SKYPE technology for our February meeting to invite the upstate districts to participate. All this travel and SKYPE technology serves the one clear purpose of developing CSJ into an influential and powerful organization that promotes our missions right down to the local grass-roots.

Furthermore, we turned our attention to local schools this past quarter. I presented my "History in a Box" program to the Italian Club of 88 energetic elementary students at Parkway Elementary School in East Meadow, L.I. The theme is many cultural artifacts we take for granted in our everyday living have their origins in Roman and Italian history. Thanks go to Immediate Past National CSJ President Tina Haemmerle who organized the event in conjunction with the teacher Anne-Marie Barbieri and her assistant Melissa. The enthusiasm was electric and the pupils were so eager to participate. This month

District 3 Chairman Tony Corsello and I will be meeting to plan our April program with St. Clare's Elementary School in Staten Island. This was the school CSJ granted \$2,000 for St. Clare's to sustain its Italian language program. School staff and CSJ personnel related so well with each other that it was decided we collaborate in a future program. I received a call from the Superintendent of the Lawrence School District on Long Island and was informed that they were creating an Italian language program in their Inwood and Cedarhurst Elementary Schools every Wednesday for 1 hour after school from now till April. We were asked to provide help if need be, and of course we will. Undoubtedly, we never forget to impress young minds on the accomplishments of Italians that hopefully over time will deflect an absorption by them of Italian stereotypes. Time will tell.

On the subject of schools I have fabulous information to report! If you remember from my last column I reported that the Greece School District, a suburb of Rochester, was entertaining the thought of eventually cutting the Italian language program in the 7th grade at Olympia High School. We galvanized into action the teachers, lodge members, and taxpayers. We targeted the district's November 12th school board meeting to demand a rescission of their proposal. At this meeting the school board trustees immediately announced that they were re-instating Italian at the above-mentioned school. Those involved were so elated that they joined the Vincent Lombardi Lodge. Thanks go to the President of the lodge and Board member Jennifer Rube' who helped me in this campaign. This effort proves that if we all stick together in a common cause we can never be defeated! In addition, now that Board member Vincent Marmorale has completed his documentary on "Saving the Jews" during WW2 he is preparing snippets from the documentary for distribution to local schools. Thank you Vinnie!

Besides schools we finally are rekindling old channels and forging new ones to spread the influence of CSJ and collaborate with other groups which could aid us in our quests. Contacts and communications have been made with Arba Sicula, AATI-LI, and B'nai B'rith. Arba Sicula ("Sicilian Dawn") for 34 years with an international membership numbering 1,800 has promoted Sicilian language, culture, history, and literature. AATI-LI (American Association of Teachers of Italian-Long Island) provides our students a tripartite dimension---by teaching Italian the students learn the history and the culture. Is it any wonder then that CSJ has chosen these two institutions as honorees at our next annual dinner/dance celebration on February 16th? It is high time that we elevate on a pedestal the literati (writers and poets) and the teachers who do so much incessantly in transmitting our culture and language to all. Without them it would be very difficult to convey that transmission. CSJ and BB have decided to plan periodic programs throughout the year to build a solid relationship and to aid each other in our missions. We are trying to secure a riveting film ("Perlasca") about an unsung Italian, Giorgio Perlasca, who saved 5,000 Jews in Hungary during WW2. We feel this effort will be a great way to initiate a strong bond between CSJ and BB, and we will invite everyone to see this movie.

During this quarter we saw a golden opportunity to fulfill our mission of promoting positive imagery of Italian culture. Over the past year and more District 1 lodges have been preparing a culture festival that will finally be launched on Saturday, June 28th at the Brush Barn property in Smithtown on Route 25. Since financial resources are a concern, I made a proposal to the lodge representatives that CSJ be the lead sponsor of the event since we are more equipped than they are. They and the CSJ Board agreed. With our Board membership and the lodge representatives working together we expect this event to be a signature extravaganza for us and Suffolk County. Plans are well underway, and we will of course keep you posted.

Never forgetting our primary mission of fighting defamation and stereotyping, we engaged in some notable occurrences for us to report to you. As soon as Columbus Day arrived, self-styled pundits and Monday morning quarterbacks surfaced to spew their usual venom and assault on Columbus' legacy. I spent the quarter battling writers and contributors to letters to the editor attempting to counteract their distortions, and it was arduous. So, I decided to create a 10-member Truth Squad and Response Team of the Board which would help me react to so many of these diatribes against Columbus at the same time. In this manner we will cover more ground without too much of a burden on one person. The Wandering Dago truck has hit the newsprint recently. The judge in the case will now deliberate on the most important item in the lawsuit against the state---the state's breach of first amendment rights of WD. It has been reported that the presiding judge wants each side to offer a definition of what a "public forum" is since the so-called breach occurred on state property (the Saratoga Raceway and Empire State Plaza, if you remember). So, we wait with bated breath for the outcome. Finally, Aflac Corporation has been peddling an ad entitled "Family Business" that subjects the Aflac duck to a mob shakedown. We've mustered facebook posts and e-mails to the company and have now combined with Italian organizations around the country with a nationwide phone campaign to two local Aflac agencies and executives, expressing our displeasure with the ad and demanding that corporate respect our appeals to terminate the ad. The company has ignored our conjurings, but we press on. Stay tuned!

On a lighter note, on February 16th we celebrated our 34th annual brunch/dinner fundraiser at Russo's on the Bay in Howard Beach, Queens. Over 200 people were in attendance to honor Arba Sicula and AATI-LI as mentioned before. Mille Grazie to Event Chairwoman Josephine Morici Cohen, Souvenir Journal Chairpersons Angela DeCosimo and Eleanor Jobbagy, Raffle Chairperson Jean Gagliardo, and the rest of the Committee---Keith Wilson, Joe Vallone, Pat Ferrari, Stella Grillo, Linda Gallo, and Molly Vallone. Many expressed to me how enthused they were at the whole event. It surely was the highlight of the month.

So onward we trek! We hope you are satisfied with what we do and feel free to offer suggestions and help. Thank you!

Fraternally,
Lou