

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE 2/3/16

Saluti ai tutti!

Despite all the fanfare during the holidays and the start of the new year this quarter, CSJ was busy. I spent quite a lot of time at various venues with diverse groups. I spoke early on to an Italian fraternity on the campus of St. Joseph's College in Brooklyn about the members' interest in the history of Italian immigration and the consequent evolution of OSIA and CSJ. Continuous "History in a Box" presentations were made at the Bayville Intermediate School, Islip High School, and the Vigiano Brothers and Papallo Lodges. I kept up my rounds around the state visiting Districts 5 and 7 where I met lodge presidents and CSJ liaisons respectively and updated both personally about CSJ issues. I added an extra attraction in 7 with the liaisons' interest in my Columbus presentation. I want to gladly thank District Chairman Greg DeCola in 5 and "Dukes" Lodge Liaison Brian Lane in 7 for their incredible hospitality shown to me for each of my visits! They were the epitome of brotherhood! Frank Pellicione of the Caboto lodge invited me to the Flushing National Bank Networking Breakfast at the Garden City Hotel where I fulminated about our work in fighting bias and bigotry and promoting a positive image of Italians. I did the same in Brooklyn when I met with the Transportation Columbia Association of New York City, a group of Italian Americans in the city transit system headed by Paul Gallo (no relation). I presented our newly updated Medal of Honor exhibit to the Italian group Bella Italia Mia in Middle Village, Queens, which was earnestly received. I thank Lee Ann Lack of the Cellini Lodge for the invitation. All these invitations were so readily accepted so as to spread the gospel of CSJ to make the public aware we stand steadfastly in fighting defamation against us and supplant that defamation with positive imagery of our people.

Furthermore, I took my own initiative in attending a Native American Symposium at Farmingdale State College to learn and understand more fully the position these Americans take about European migration to the new world of 15th and 16thc. as we attempt to meet their challenge about Columbus' legacy. I also attended a symposium on Frank Sinatra at Hofstra University which took part in the centennial activities of the birth of Sinatra. It was enticing to know more about this phenomenal figure beyond his popular singing style and talent.

Turning our attention to other positive developments, early in the quarter a titillating breakthrough occurred regarding our drive to seek greater recognition for Luigi Del Bianco, the chief carver of Mount Rushmore. Since Lou Del Bianco, Luigi's grandson, Doug Gladstone, the author of a book about Luigi, and I put enough pressure on the National Park Service over the last few months, the NPS asked two historians to investigate the evidence concerning Luigi's accomplishments. Both unanimously concluded that Luigi truly deserves separate recognition at the Park site! This development now sets in motion, according to federal law, a "consultation process" for the NPS Director to follow to make a final decision about Luigi's recognition. Certain technical criteria are involved that have to be met. The same holds true for any monument in his honor at the Park site. If these are met, Luigi will get separate recognition and a monument in his honor. So, it's obvious it will take much more time before we all realize our dream about Luigi Del Bianco, but we are confident.

While the above development was unfolding, we finally launched the "Suffolk County Taste of Italy Day" encouraged so much by County Executive Steve Bellone during Italian Culture and Heritage Month. It was a tremendous hit, a true cultural outburst! Seven Suffolk County Italian

Americans were honored in different fields. Vendors provided sumptuous Italian fare. Dave Setteducati from the Sellaro Lodge and tenor Vincent Ricciardi belted out Italian hits and played to standing ovations. CSJ provided its Medal of Honor exhibit, wall posters on famous Italian women, and a display of Commedia D'Arte reminiscent of Carnevale. Susan Gatti, a local Italian American artist displayed her wares, and proclamations were distributed to OSIA members for their dedication in making so much of the Day possible. Kudos to District 1 CSJ Chairman Charles Lucie, District 1 State Trustee Geri Graham, State Culture Chairwoman Diana Grauer, yours truly, and the County Executive's staff led by Grace Ioannidis. As far as how many attended, one vendor told us she gave out 300 reusable bags at the affair! So, stay tune for next year and don't miss this exciting event!

As far as exciting is concerned, over the summer I received an unsolicited letter and galley proof of a book by a one Peter Stepanek from Osterville, Massachusetts. As I read the letter and perused the galley proof I was fascinated by the subject! Somehow Peter discovered NY CSJ and communicated to me that he was doing research and writing a book about the injustices committed at the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1920. This notorious murder of a paymaster and security guard at a shoe company in Braintree, Massachusetts, the follow-up trial and execution of the two have been since that time a subject of suspicion. What eventually peaked Peter's attention was a family friend over the years had said to Peter's family that he knew who did the murder, and it wasn't Sacco nor Vanzetti! The family friend actually hobnobbed with the real killers, five Russian Bolsheviks who needed the money to start a Communist revolution in the U.S., and they told the friend they did it! The case was a real railroad job! Peter and I have had conversations since the summer, and he told me that former Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis has contacted him and is interested in Peter's work! Dukakis and I are the only ones who have a galley proof, and as Peter has said Dukakis "wants to run with the case." Peter now has access to actual forensic evidence from the case, which he will examine to determine if Sacco and Vanzetti were really railroaded or not. Only time will tell, and I will update you accordingly.

Another promising breakthrough is in the making regarding Our Lady of Loreto Church in Brooklyn. Thanks to the collaboration of Mario Toglia and I we have recruited a community group that is interested in using the building as a cultural center—The Brownsville Heritage Center. I have spoken to its Director Miriam Robertson and urged her to write a letter to the NYC Landmarks Commission expressing her interest. Such interest is pivotal because we need to show community support and use for the building as a criterion for landmarking the church as historically significant, which in turn will make the church eligible for restoration money. Thusly, the Diocese cannot demolish the church. NYS CSJ will then supplement the Heritage Center's letter with one of its own as Mario prepares an application package for the landmarking. Once approved, our interest will then be fulfilled since the building's unique cast stone technology will be preserved! It amounts to a win-win for both CSJ and the local community.

Some other positives are worthy of note. An Italian American of New York State, Prof. Joseph Tusiani, has been recognized by Gov. Andrew Cuomo as Poet Laureate Emeritus. I'm sure you've heard of the nomination of Mike Piazza, the notorious Mets catcher, as a nominee for Baseball's Hall of Fame. That makes for 5 Italian Americans in the last two years and 13 overall. Under the direction of District 3 CSJ Chairman Tony Corsello in conjunction with Golden Lion Editor Sal Moschella CSJ is preparing a new updated poster on Italian American Hall of Famers for use by lodges and schools. Now that we've updated our Medal of Honor kit with four new recipients District 2 CSJ Liaison Janet Galvin working with Sal is doing more research to

find others. We're at 29 now. I've written to the RAI Corporation to seek permission to show the Perlasca film statewide. We hope we get the dispensation. Lastly, thanks to Executive Board member Liz Rizzo we are in contact with a Patrick Morelli who does free lectures for non-profits on fighting bias and bigotry. We're making arrangements for an upcoming meeting with him to make us better fighters.

On the negative side, we had issues to tackle. Matt Giuliano from the Petrosino Lodge protested so vehemently about an inaccurate Columbus piece distributed in his daughter's class that the teacher and the principal decided not to ever introduce it again. We followed the matter up with a thank you letter to the principal. Thanks to Pat Greco of the Gulotta Lodge we learned of the churlish, racist video spoof ("Bensonhurst Dating Game") that derogates both Italians and Blacks. We've tried to get it off Facebook, but did not succeed. We are now turning to the NAACP for help. In the December/January issue of AARP was an article ("Old Fellas") about aging Italian mobsters still committing crimes and using their health problems to escape conviction or imprisonment. It has no redeeming value at all for readers! We sent it to National for review since AARP is headquartered in D.C. In District 8 we have issues: a Mike Marsocci is peddling videos on Facebook that review local Italian restaurants with broken English and an Italian accent. We're working hard to convince him to drop them. The other matter is a spoof on the "Three Tenors" concerts with Godfather movie fonts and imagery for advertising, not the comedic show itself. Thanks to the work of Executive Board member Silvano Orsi, District 8 CSJ Chairman Dr. Joseph Rube', Silvano, and I had a phone conference with the promoter who agreed to halt any further such advertising! However, the biggest blockbuster is the introduction of a bill in the Colorado House of Representatives to eliminate Columbus Day in Colorado. Along with efforts of the Colorado Grand Lodge and CSJ, we are targeting each member of the Committee entertaining the bill and flooding them with e-mails to terminate such action! I've also urged National CSJ President Kevin Cairra to step up his efforts to move on the "Save Columbus Day " petitions we have formulated and suggested a "Columbus Truth Squad" of instructors and historians to circulate around to community groups nationwide to bolster efforts to protect the holiday. We have to be successful in these efforts now in Colorado before there's a head of steam coming east!

Stay tuned! We've got a lot more on the way.

Fraternally,
Lou