

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE 2/1/17

Saluti!

I hope you enjoyed the holidays this past season. We did, and it was a great repast we had at Ciminelli's in Bethpage, celebrating Christmas and another CSJ year of success with my "Year in Review" speech before the Board and lodge liaisons. The pace accelerated as soon as the holidays were over.

We spent a lot of time in late 2016 and early 2017 wrestling with some challenges relative to the landmarking of Our Lady of Loreto Church in Brooklyn, our continuing saga. The State Preservation Office (SHPO) sent us a letter stating that over the last six years no viable proposal for the landmarking of the church had been provided through the Request for Proposals (RFPs) process, and since Catholic Charities POP, the development arm of the diocese of Brooklyn, had provided a list of alternate proposals for the site to SHPO, POP could proceed to demolition. Of course, we responded immediately that the RFP guidelines were so restrictive no viable proposal was possible, especially since two interested entities submitted RFPs in the past and were summarily rejected. We also argued that POP did not abide by the Letter of Resolution of 2010 which mandated that POP had to secure the building from any degradation over the course of those six years. We noted from observation that doors were open and holes to the facade and roof were clearly visible. We accused POP of purposely letting the structure deteriorate and consequently demanded that SHPO stop the demolition. Furthermore, since our Brownsville Cultural coalition was growing now we implored SHPO to allow the Coalition more time to do a conditions assessment to determine the cost of the restoration and search for an entity which could devise an appropriate restoration plan for landmarking. We then turned our attention to contacting local elected officials once again and apprised them of the precarious nature of our efforts presently. As a result of a letter by me, we have now enlisted the support of St. Sen. Tony Avella of Brooklyn who wrote to the Diocese to urge the officials there to meet with our Coalition. We then took to the airways on Brooklyn News 12 to air our concerns. I then solicited the support of Brooklyn UNICO which launched its own campaign amongst its members and about a score of other Italian organizations in Brooklyn. I have petitioned the Italic Institute of America and the Center for Italian Studies at SUNY Stony Brook to join the effort. I have reached out to two contacts to help us financially with the interior restoration of the church, and I await their response. Hopefully these latest efforts will translate into pressure and action against POP and force the Diocese to concede to our demands and halt the demolition. We'll keep you updated.

As far as updating you about the challenges to Columbus Day, it's turning out to be a hubbub. There's lots happening now. This quarter challenges surfaced in the cities of Baltimore and Sacramento, and thanks to a strong effort there by Italian American organizations the city councils voted NOT to change Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. However, Nebraska, San Francisco, and Alaska changed Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. Students at Pepperdine University in southern California protested so vehemently in February about a Columbus statue on its campus that the administration literally deported the statue to its campus in Florence, Italy to appease them. We faced our own challenge in New York when the New Paltz Central School District considered the issue in December, but we organized quite a strong force in protest which sensitized the district to "explore the issue further" rather than change the day. Taking no chances I assigned newly-appointed Executive Board member Ed Bochynski to monitor the situation regularly and report back to us. In January the issue percolated again in

the Southampton School District when it was rumored that the issue would be on the February 7th school board agenda. We immediately dispatched some e-mails early on, and then a press release appeared in the Southampton Press that said the item would not be discussed by the school board on the 7th and was deferred to an "undetermined date." Practically simultaneously I noticed an article in the "We Italians Newsletter" that the Williamsville School District outside of Buffalo was exploring the change. Instantly I contacted Peter LoJacono, the President of the Italian Federated Societies of Western New York, which is attempting to halt the onslaught. Peter graciously asked for our help, and we have adopted our usual courses of action.

As much as we always play defense we've inaugurated some thrusts on offense. I implore all of you to please step up your efforts regarding the "Save Columbus Day" petitions. Remember, we have to get 100,000 signatures by April 30th to make our campaign an effective effort for the federal government to take serious action. Please oblige! I would ask you also to check your new 2017 calendars to make sure Columbus Day appears. If not, let us know. This attitude was prompted last year when we learned that the Bethpage Federal Credit Union on Long Island had left the holiday off its 2016 calendar, claiming that it was just an oversight (we hope!). We're checking this year's, and you check too. As a response to the NEA's action in encouraging school districts nationwide to change Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day and willing to spend \$57,500 to do it, as previously reported, I dispatched letters to the NYSSBA (New York State School Boards Association) and the NYSCSS (the New York State Council of School Superintendents) and demanded they resist NEA's actions and emphatically made the point that NYS CSJ will be in the forefront of the fight! We will also be doing a statewide study and evaluation of the social studies textbooks as far as their coverage of Columbus and decide what course of action to take. We are considering fabricating our own DVD on Columbus to be distributed to the schools. We've recommended to National CSJ that they contact the U.S. Post Office to fashion a forever stamp to commemorate the 525th anniversary this year of Columbus' landing in the New World. However, we learned that such requests are only entertained in multiples of 50, so such a campaign could not be done until 25 years hence.

Nevertheless, despite the enormous whirlwind regarding this issue NYS CSJ will maintain its vigilance statewide, stand its ground, and respond as quickly and as effectively as we can. **WE WILL NOT REST!** We will protect the legacy of Columbus!

Besides Columbus you know we also invest generally in promoting and preserving our Italian heritage. This past quarter we spent thousands of dollars to restock our storage facility with new and more pamphlets, posters, and bookmarks on many facets of Italian culture to be distributed to your lodges, schools, and communities. So, feel free to make contact with us if you need these materials. Furthermore, I am elated to tell you that two authors are now ready to have their works published that would enhance a positive image of our people. One entitled "the 13th Silent Juror" boldly professes that Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were wrongfully prosecuted, convicted, and executed regarding the notorious robbery of the payroll of the Morrill Shoe Company in Massachusetts and the killing of the payroll clerk and security guard on April 15, 1920. The author Peter Stepanek knows for sure because a family friend, Adam Smolyer, told him that the conspiracy was hatched in his home! The real killers were five Russian Communists who needed money to launch a Communist revolution in the USA. Imagine what a blockbuster this book would be when published as it would amount to an exoneration of these men and improve our image for that time! Peter has asked me to seek a literary agent to get the book published. The other is entitled "In the Shadow of the Mountain," a chronicle of the 25-year wrenching campaign forged by the Del Bianco family as they

struggled mightily to force the National Park Service to singularly recognize Luigi Del Bianco as the Chief Carver of Mount Rushmore. Around June 2017 this official recognition will occur. When one observes the features of this iconic structure, one is espying the actual work of Luigi Del Bianco! No words are necessary as far as what the unveiling will mean for the positive image of a great Italian artisan.

Although we can revel in glory about these occurrences, NYS CSJ always felt there was a need to inculcate these in the hearts and minds of young people. Besides our usual "History in a Box" program, thanks to the seminal efforts by District 2 Chairwoman Jean Gagliardo, we were able to launch in December "CSJ in the Classroom." We assembled a modest group of teachers at the Marco Polo Lodge where Executive Board member Vincent Marmorale introduced a snippet of his documentary "My Italian Secret" about Italians saving the Jews during WW2 and distributed a DVD of the film to the teachers for use in the classroom. I presented to them the functions of CSJ and then allowed them to cobble together our cultural material on display for their students. We culminated the session with a small group discussion with the teachers about how to effectively teach students to recognize and fight bias and bigotry. We all agreed to continue these sessions regularly.

Finally, in early February we invited Patrick Morelli, a lecturer and expert on mass media and fighting bias and bigotry, to the NYS CSJ to educate us further as to how to be effective with proven tactics to fight said bias and bigotry. Twenty attended and lively discussions ensued throughout the session.

Stay tuned for the next enlivening edition of NYS CSJ!