

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE 7/10/14

Saluti i miei fratelli e sorelle!

I hope you are enjoying the summer as best as you can. Yet the work of CSJ trundles on. We opened the quarter in April with another presentation of my "History in a Box" presentation at the Luigi Pirandello Lodge in Fresh Meadows, Queens—a testament to our lives literally surrounded by Italian innovation and inventions. This presentation was done six times now to 3 lodges and 3 schools, and at the convention 2 more requests were made. I really do appreciate the interest since it exemplifies our interest in our Italian legacy. Let's keep it going!

Speaking of the convention, CSJ provided a display of positive image materials at the entrance to the hall, and I must commend all delegates for their interest throughout the convention in taking so much of our material. We were almost completely cleaned out! Thank you, and spread it to your lodges, schools, and libraries. Let it be known what we do and have done! Our video was shown just prior to my presentation highlighting the year's eclectic work, and we held a workshop on the Friday afternoon attended by not only Board members but also some delegates. Our discussion focused on suggestions to address defamation of Italians in the media, and the general consensus was we need National's help to arrest the problem. This consensus was channeled to National for their review and consideration. Again, thank you for your interest and support, especially that the delegates saw fit to award us with \$2,000 more in donations than last year.

Furthermore, at the convention I was afforded the opportunity to discuss with the Vincent Lombardi Lodge some issues emerging in District 8. Although we were successful in reinstating Italian at Olympia High School in the Greece School District last November, parents and students for the first time demanded the introduction of Italian at Odyssey High School in Greece. The School Board refused. Casa Italiana, the Italian culture center at Nazareth College in Rochester, is slated for trouble too. Because Nazareth is facing financial trouble, college officials cut the Director, Dr. Stella Plutino-Calabrese, a former Coronaro award recipient of ours, and replaced her with a professor who is going to retire next year. Thanks to a teacher of Italian, Lino Pizzolanti in the Greece School District, he will begin now to mobilize teachers and parents at Odyssey High School to revive the Italian language issue and meet with the new professor of Casa Italiana concerning our interest there. I will provide updates. In addition, the lodge will revive the essay contest in local schools originally proposed and organized by our late District 8 Chairwoman Jennifer Rube'

Regarding Jennifer, the CSJ Executive Board donated \$100 to the Vincent Lombardi Lodge for their scholarship fund and a \$250 brick to the museum in memory of Jennifer at the convention. Thanks to the work and research of District 8 State Trustee Tony DeCostanzo, he has made a recommendation to me for a new District 8 CSJ Chairman that I will follow up on. Thank you Tony.

While on the subject of challenges to school Italian language programs, we are now faced with an emerging plethora of more cuts. Sewanaka and Utica school districts are entertaining cuts, and President Joe Rondinelli has informed me he wants us to work on re-introducing Italian in the Seaford School District. I have been in contact with the superintendent at Sewanaka and an interested party gathering the facts before we take action. Thanks to the vigilance of District 6 CSJ Chairman Joe DiCarlo, he is providing me with material and updates of the situation in Utica. In May I took a trip to Albany to meet with the District 6 presidents and deputies to encourage them to aggressively recruit lodge liaisons to bolster our strength in working on CSJ problems. Consequently, I am entertaining the idea of meeting with the New York State Council of School Superintendents to make them aware of our concern with this

problem statewide. In the immediate sense I am thinking of mobilizing a CSJ Task Force to make contact with these districts simultaneously to ward off the program-cutting juggernaut seemingly emerging. Recording Secretary Keith Wilson is stepping up his continuous efforts of assessing the Long Island districts regarding the status of Italian with a new survey requesting specific information. Stay tuned for further developments.

In the midst of all this heady hijinks, I attended the NELA Awards Affair in May for the very first time. I'm so glad I went, for it allowed me to meet and gain a rapport with our National OSIA President Anthony Baratta and the eventual new National CSJ president Joe Boncore from Massachusetts. Every leisure moment I dedicated my time to discuss serious CSJ issues, especially the necessity of a strong national organization with supportive state satellites. If you have followed the racist issue of pro basketball's LA Clippers owner Donald Sterling, Adam Silver, the National Basketball Association Commissioner, stated in the press that all fines against Sterling will be distributed to ANTI-DEFAMATION GROUPS!! I have already written to Boncore about writing a letter to the Commissioner to put in a bid for said money. What an opportunity! I hope we're successful.

One of my other concerns with National was the issue in April of the city of Minneapolis' resolution substituting Columbus Day, a legal federal holiday, with Indigenous Peoples Day. Thanks to my driven appeals, President Baratta instructed Boncore to write a letter to the city. Joe Boncore sent me the letter for my review, and with a few suggested changes by me, Boncore sent the letter. We haven't heard back yet, but I continue to pressure Boncore to mobilize all state CSJ chairmen to help at once! I continue to impress him that our predecessors were successful with stopping California over the same issue, and therefore we must apply the same policy with Minneapolis forthwith! I'm still waiting for a reply.

In fact, very shortly I will send to Boncore my agenda of issues that National MUST entertain now with strong states' support in order to make CSJ a truly worthy powerhouse on defamation and positive image issues. Hopefully, that dream will come true.

Turning now to more sublime experiences, I am elated to report to you that on June 14th the Town of Islip re-dedicated Anthony Casamento Park thanks to the efforts of West Babylon vet Arnold Merkitch and our CSJ. Islip personnel and officials were so committed in launching this effort that I've written a letter to Supervisor Tom Croci thanking him profusely. A plaque was dedicated and photo releases to the press were issued with CSJ playing a prominent part. Furthermore, another great hit took place on June 28th at the Smithtown Historical Society Fairgrounds—our long-awaited Suffolk County Heritage and Culture Festival sponsored by CSJ and the Society. The compliments are still coming and buzzing, and the weather was absolutely perfect! Mille grazie to all state officials, lodges, members and your friends and relatives who attended. We had about 1,500 in attendance, and I hope the lodges scored with new members! Performers, presenters, and vendors want to return, and the Festival Committee has already met and critiqued the affair. Yes, they want to do it next year, and we will be meeting in September to begin the task anew! Their confidence is literally soaring, especially since it took the whole committee a year to plan it all, and at times we were proceeding down blind paths with no assurance of succeeding, but we always somehow prevailed. In the final analysis we had a great crew that really stuck it out—Tom Bandise and Gerri Ianello Graham from the Sellaro Lodge (with Bob Graham on Festival Day), Diana Grauer and Joe Tursi from the Toscanini Lodge, Joe Vallone and Richie Macellaro from the Papallo Lodge, District 1 CSJ Chairman Charlie Lucie from the Perry Como Lodge, Luisa Potenza and Cathy LaGrega from the Basilone Lodge, Gene DeMaria, Luisa's friend, Tony Rotoli from the Vigiano Bros. Lodge, and Liz Rizzo and

yours truly from the Landi Lodge. When President Joe commended the CSJ and me personally I then knew my dream was finally fulfilled. Voila!

Have a great summer and look forward to the annual CSJ/AIAE Unity Breakfast on Sunday, September 14th from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m. at Hofstra University. We'll be in touch.

Fraternally,
Lou