

## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE 7/2/15

Saluti Fratelle e Sorelle!

Summer is now upon us, and I hope you're enjoying the season. As I now have a chance to reflect subsequent to our state convention this year, I want to personally congratulate Carolyn Reres for acceding to the Presidency of our Order and thank her graciously for appointing me for another term as the New York State Chairman of the CSJ. I wish her the best of good fortune, and I will work just as diligently as I did under her predecessor Joe Rondinelli.

The last edition of the Golden Lion did not allow me enough space to review for you bias and bigotry issues that surfaced at that time. So, a synopsis of these are in order. Radio stations 95.1 and 96.5 in upstate Rochester went to the extreme on defamation through the callous and carefree use of the slur "dago" referring to Italians. Thanks to the spontaneity of CSJ Executive Board member Silvano Orsi in District 8 these stations were taken to task. Not only did the radio jockeys apologize publicly on the air, but the executives at 95.1 repented by allowing Silvano to come on the air and publicize the Italian Festival he runs in Rochester and matching dollar-for-dollar any revenues he would receive at the festival. Great work Silvano!

Then, it was back to the Southampton School District for another simmering crisis. An article appeared in the local weekly there, the Southampton Press, that mentioned that 7th graders in the Southampton Intermediate School had held a mock trial on Columbus and convicted him of murder. Furthermore, they appeared before the school board to request a change in the name of the holiday Columbus Day. Thanks to the superintendent's invitation I quickly dispatched myself to this school and made a 45-minute positive presentation on Columbus' pivotal discovery in world history. Press and radio coverage were checkered, but some students did admit the presentation had value. Follow-up included my sending an article written by New Jersey State Historian Sal Turchio to the teachers and students about the proper context of Columbus in history. I will continue to further our cause with a dialogue with the Shinnecock Nation in Southampton.

Shortly after this crisis, a TV and internet commercial surfaced regarding Halos Mandarins. It involved a young female child upset that her household had run out of Halos mandarins. She retaliated by placing a headless toy horse in her father's bed, which terrified him to the extent that he hustled to the supermarket to stock up on more mandarins. We vehemently expressed our outrage to the company, the ad department, and the talent agency which hired the girl for using a Godfather movie image to portray its point. I sent a press release to the major daily, the Delano Record, in Delano, California, the location of corporate headquarters, demanding that the commercial be taken off the air and urged readers to boycott Halos mandarins. Follow-up is still needed because the commercial is still running on the internet.

Furthermore, a most disturbing article appeared in the New York Post that was a shocker! Queens Supreme Court Justice Duane Hart unsuspectingly looked at the surname and asked the plaintiff before him, a naturalized citizen from Italy, Maurizio Oppedisano, if he had mob connections. The plaintiff was stunned! Hart even made a joke about it. Incensed I dispatched a letter to the New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct excoriating the judge. The Commission replied to me and said the matter was under review and eventually I would be notified of the result.

Continuing in this vein, a lodge member in District 8 brought an article to my attention in early May entitled "Does Your Corporate Mission Statement Pass the Mafia Test?" This article was a horror on two counts. Firstly, it was written by a gentleman who headed the Rochester

BUSINESS ETHICS Foundation (emphasis added). Secondly, the author, James Nortz, posed the question to corporate executives about whether their companies demand loyalty, respect, and obedience just like the Mafia, as if these traits are wholly endemic to the Mafia only! The Executive Board and District 8 liaisons responded to Mr. Nortz by telling him that these qualities are natural in any worthy corporation. There was absolutely no need to judge corporations against a diabolical syndicate. Nortz did reply by saying he meant no harm and he was sorry to offend.

From Rochester we turned our attention to New York City. Thanks to the vigilance and efforts of National CSJ Vice-president John Fratta, we've come to learn that the NYC schools have an Al Capone book series as part of its required reading list for elementary school students ("Al Capone Does My Shirts," "Shines My Shoes," and "Does My Homework"—3 books). In fact, the contents of the books have nothing to do with Al Capone per se! So, we wonder then why the titles? Overtures have been made to Schools Chancellor Carmen Farina to meet to discuss the series, but she has not responded. John has planned a rally in July in front of her office to protest the book and her indifference. I also plan to write to Farina and meet with the author to investigate her mindset about these titles. Our goal is drop the series from the schools' reading list. Hopefully, we'll be successful.

New York City has just been the scene of another brouhaha. The New York Daily News has released a story describing the feud between Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio over recent political issues. Pictures included in the article show both looking like mobsters wearing fedoras and shooting machine guns at each other. Of course, it's obvious what the portrayal represents! John Fratta and I have agreed that we must now meet with the editors or the publisher to demand a change in attitude when covering Italian Americans in the news.

How amazing it is that in so many quarters so many take so much license in defaming and stereotyping Italian people! We will remain ever so vigilant and take bold action to stop this mania, and of course please give us your support when called upon so we can be as effective as possible.

As much as we get frustrated by these occurrences, there are always positive things that bring euphoria and pride to us. I was invited in May to the Wappingers Central School District Italian Awards Night gala in Hopewell Junction sponsored by the Joe DiMaggio Lodge and led by Joe Zingone. What an impressive affair it was! There 786 students took Italian in the district this year. Of that number 350 received certificates that night for maintaining a 90% average or above! One student from each of the 4 high schools received a major scholarship also. Superintendents, school board trustees, principals, parents, teachers, and students all attended the event—a real collaborative, joyous effort by all stakeholders! A nationwide petition was circulated in May for the great Yankee catcher Yogi Berra to award him the Presidential Medal of Freedom for not only his prowess as a ballplayer but also for his social activism. NYS CSJ took part. The petition had to have 100,000 signatures by June 8th for the presidential administration to seriously entertain the petition. By that deadline date 103,000 were secured! Joseph Scafidi who works closely with Yankee owners the Steinbrenner family told us that CSJ's efforts were a significant reason why the threshold was reached! The next stop is the President of the United States! At this year's state convention District 7 CSJ Chairman Carmine Federico was awarded the Bene Emeritus Award. At the state scholarship breakfast Dr. Annamaria Monaco of Suffolk Community College, who works closely with CSJ in the promotion of the Italian language,

received the Cornaro Award, and on Founders Day in June Josephine Morici Cohen and Mike Santo received the Lifetime Achievement Awards. We are elated that these four garnered the awards this year, which enhances the prestige of CSJ. Great work all of you! Finally, this year's summer cultural festival was a big hit on June 27th despite the weather dampening the attendance. About 720 people attended with approximately 40 vendors selling their wares. Entertainers and presenters still performed passionately and enthralled the crowd. Italian culture and heritage were staged for all to see and enjoy! A whale of thanks to the whole Festival Committee which worked so hard for nine months!

SEMPRE AVANTI!

Fraternally,  
Lou