

New York State Commission for Social Justice
Fall 2017 Plenary Session
Report

Brothers and Sister,

This has been an extremely active period for CSJ. Our fight continues to save Columbus Day and its statues. Saturday Night Live is still in the mix of our fights to defend our heritage and culture. In spite of all this our executive committee has some new initiatives to promote a positive image for Italian Americans.

Attack on Columbus Day and his statues

Let me bring you up to date on where we stand in this fight. First, you should know this is a battle on two fronts. The first being in New York City with regard to his statue in Columbus Circle and throughout New York City, the second throughout the Country.

In New York City, NYSOSIA and CSJ have been part of a coalition of over 50 Italian American groups fighting to preserve Columbus Day and his statues. We are one of the lead groups in this fight along with the Columbus Citizens Foundation, the Italian American Museum, the Italian Legal Defense and Higher Education Fund and the Knights of Columbus. We have had many conference calls and meetings to develop a strategy to fight this assault. The New York State CSJ has invested over \$6,000.00 in this campaign and the other groups have done the same or more. NYCSJ purchase Save Columbus Day tee shirts and magnets that were given out along the parade routes of both the Long island parade and the New York City parade. We also paid our public relations firm to help us with a press conference at the Columbus Club.

Our coalition sent out letters to every candidate seeking office in New York City asking their opinion regarding Columbus Day and the statue. We made it very clear that they had two options only in their response, yes they support and no they are opposed. We also made it very clear that if we did not hear back from them by a certain period of time we will count them as a no. of the 144 letters that were sent out we received 53 responses all positive. All the City wide candidates with the exception of the Mayor

responded to our letter. Governor Cuomo and Senator Schumer have also come out in support of Columbus Day and the statue. Senator Gillibrand's office is still quiet on this issue. We are planning a major press conference before Election Day to announce those that are and are not supporting Columbus.

We are getting mixed signals from the people around the mayor that the statue will not be taken down. However, they are now in the talks of placing a kiosk telling the other side of the story. We are unified in being opposed to any plaque or kiosk attacking the reputation of Columbus with unverifiable information. Whether they move to take the statue down or try to place a informational kiosk at that location we are ready to take this issue to court. I am very happy to report that as of today we have collected an additional 10,000 plus signatures on our Save Columbus Day petitions.

CSJ is looking at various ways to raised needed funds to continue this fight on all fronts. We are looking into setting up a separate account to be used for the Columbus fight. One way of raising money will be the sale of Save Columbus Day tee shirts and magnets. We are working on the mechanism to be able to sell and mail these items out. We are also going to ask for people to donate to CSJ just for this fight.

Columbus Day Parades

I want to personally thank all our members who came out and marched in the Columbus Day Parades this year. I especially want to thank those that came out to 5th Avenue in the rain to show your support. We had the largest contingent in the parade this year with over 400 members.

Saturday Night Live

We are still fighting this disgusting episode that attacked Italian Americans. We did have the press conference at Columbus Circle, however that was the same day Councilwoman Viveito announced plans to remove the Columbus statue. The press conference became more about Columbus than Saturday Night Live. We are continuing to demand that sponsors pull their ads from this show and are demanding a public apology. I will keep you informed of future developments.

Positive Image

Hofstra Italian American Experience

We had a great day at the Hofstra Italian American Experience. I want to thank Eleanor Jabbagy for all the work that she did to make it a success for OSIA. Many of our tables had information as well as membership applications and Save Columbus Day petitions. We were the first group to speak on the stage. President Ferrito gave remarks and talked about OSIA. That was followed by our members in the traditional dress of Italy narrated by Joseph Sciamè. Everyone had a good time.

San Gennaro Feast

New York OSIA had a float in the San Gennaro Parade led by our State President and Past President Joe Sciamè and Chazz Palmintieri. This event gave us the opportunity to showcase our traditional dress of Italy program. Our members were on the one float purchased by OSIA and the second float purchased by Figli Di San Gennaro. Thousands of people applauded as these two floats passed by.

New CSJ Grant Program

We are in the process of putting criteria together for a new grant program aimed at 7th and 8th graders and possibly high school students throughout the state to regarding their Italian heritage and culture. The grants will be one per district of \$200.00 each for the 7th and 8th graders and one per district of high schoolers. The committee I set up for this will be finalizing this criteria and bring it back for a vote of the CSJ Executive Board. We hope this program will begin to stimulate interest in our youngsters to learn and be proud of their heritage. I will keep you informed as we go further into this program.

Legislative Breakfast

The Executive Board is in the early process of planning a legislative breakfast. We feel it is time that our elected officials know about OSIA and the CSJ. Keith Wilson is chairing this initiative and we will have more information as we move forward.

Again, my Brothers and Sisters, I want to thank you all for the support and encouragement for moving CSJ forward.

Fraternally,

John A. Fratta