

PLENARY SESSION REPORT

JANUARY 30, 2016

HOST

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VISITATIONS

Having been invited to various venues throughout the quarter, yours truly spent a lot of time spreading the word and message of CSJ to diverse groups. Thanks to Anne Marie Mace from the Daughters and Sons Lodge I spoke to an Italian fraternal society at St. Joseph's College in Brooklyn where much to their interest the members wanted to know about the history of Italian immigration to this country and the evolution of our Order and CSJ. I was elated to discover that young Italian Americans were so interested in our culture and history. Something we should all feel enthralled about. "History in a Box" was alive and well as I made presentations to the Bayville Intermediate School, Islip High School, and the Vigiano Brothers and Papallo Lodges. The program is getting such wide acclaim that an article was written in the winter edition of Italian America magazine, and from that article I did receive inquiries from a lodge in Akron, Ohio and an Italian American group from Fort Lauderdale, Florida! In November I traveled to the Duca Degli Abruzzi Lodge in Endicott for a twofold mission: a presentation on Columbus and a meeting with the District 7 CSJ Chairperson Carmine Federico and lodge liaisons as part of my usual rounds. The Columbus presentation was so enthusiastically received that it was mentioned in the lodge's January newsletter, and the District 7 meeting allowed me time to meet face-to-face with the group to review CSJ matters firsthand. A whale of thanks should be extended to the "Dukes" for their incomparable hospitality and preparations for my Columbus presentation, particularly liaison Brian Lane who made me feel so comfortable with ease! I continued my rounds in December meeting with the District 5 Presidents Council at the Rockland Lodge in Blauvelt. Frank Pellicione from 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 presenting a positive image of Italians. Having met Paul Gallo, the Chairman of the Transportation Columbia Association of New York City, an organization of Italian Americans in the transit industry, through CSJ Executive Board member Tom Adamo, this group was very curious about our CSJ. Once I made the presentation I was handed an issue that perturbs so many of these members. The NYC Transit Authority has a wage timesheet that uses a "WOP" code to represent a union member doing union work on city time, who is then paid by the union and not the Authority for that time. In effect the union member is "without pay" from the Authority. I did fire off a letter to the Authority about such a protest and hopefully the situation can be ameliorated. I haven't heard anything yet. Thanks to Lee Ann Lack from the Cellini Lodge I presented our updated Medal of Honor Exhibit and DVD to the Bella Italia Mia organization in Middle Village, Queens. I was much surprised at how much assiduous time was spent by the members studying the exhibit and perusing the accompanying booklet. They were really interested!

Furthermore, I took the time without invitation to attend two events that peaked my interest. One was a Native American Symposium at Farmingdale State College in October. As expected the panelists took potshots not so much at Columbus but more of Europeans as a whole whom they excoriated for past barbarous acts and atrocities that they feel still create traumas today against Native Americans. I feel it's so important to attend these to gauge the mindset of those who are actively engaged in eliminating Columbus Day, which could help us meet their challenge. Secondly, on a more positive note I attended a symposium about Frank Sinatra hosted by Hofstra University to commemorate the 100th anniversary of his birth. What was so

interesting were the remarks made by those who knew him. They gave much insight into this phenomenal figure beyond his great talent.

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

Early in the quarter a titillating breakthrough happened 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 concluded that Luigi truly does deserve 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. If they are met, Luigi gets separate recognition. Another protocol is applied separately regarding any monument that may be erected in his honor. It is obvious that such law eliminates any possible biases by the Director and any undue pressure by special interest groups. So, we are on our way, but it seems it will take more deliberate time before a final decision is actually reached.

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 Italian Americans were honored in different fields. Three or four 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 Charlie Lucie, State Trustee Geri Graham, State Culture Chairwoman Diana Grauer, yours truly, and the County Executive's staff led by Grace Ioannidis. The chemistry between OSIA and Suffolk County was extraordinary, and one of the vendors said 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 guard at a shoe company in Braintree, Massachusetts, the followup trial and execution of the two have been since that time a subject of suspicion. What peaked Peter's attention was a family friend over the years who had said to Peter's family that he knew who did the murder and it wasn't Sacco and Vanzetti. This 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 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. I envision a blockbuster that will hopefully induce the Massachusetts Legislature or the U.S. Congress to exonerate the two from a wrongful conviction and execution, if Peter's book proves the case. Can you imagine what that would mean to the Italian American community in this country 100 years later?

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 for a culture 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 as a criterion for landmarking the church, which in turn will make the church eligible for restoration money, and the diocese then cannot demolish the church. NY CSJ will then supplement the Heritage Center's letter with one of its own, and Mario is now preparing the package for the landmarking. Once approved, our interest will then be satisfied since the building's unique cast stone technology will be preserved! It amounts to a win-win for both the CSJ and the community.

We scored another win when Cesare Maniccia from the Gabrielle D'Annunzio Lodge in Schenectady and a former District 6 State Trustee accepted the helm as District 6 CSJ Chairman. Cesare has taken the position because of the resignation of Joe DiCarlo from the same lodge, who is literally bogged down with heavy job responsibilities. I want to thank Joe for being such a vigilant watchdog concerning the promotion and sustenance of the Italian language in the schools and his efforts in addressing the heady issue of the Mafia Party on New Year's Eve at the Holiday inn Express in Latham in 2015, which resulted in the termination of the hotel's management company. Thanks loads Joe!

Other personalities have just achieved wide acclaim, and all Italian Americans should be euphoric about them. Firstly, Professor Joseph Tusiani has been recognized by Governor Andrew Cuomo and Columbus Citizens Foundation President Angelo Vivolo as Poet Laureate Emeritus of New York State. Secondly, Mike Piazza, the notorious catcher for the New York Mets, has been selected this year as an inductee for the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. That makes 5 Italian American inductees in the last two years and 13 overall. Under the direction of District 3 CSJ Chairman Tony Corsello in conjunction with Sal Moschella, the Golden Lion newspaper Editor, we are preparing a new updated poster on Italian American Hall of Famers that should be ready by convention time for all lodges and schools. Once again we've proven that Italian Americans steadily excel and are admired by the public. We must provocatively emphasize these recent occurrences to offset media negativity. Please do your part.

In this vein I have called upon District 2 liaison Janet Galvin of the Caboto Lodge to undertake once again another assignment with Sal Moschella in researching other possible recipients of the Medal of Honor. We have some more leads which they will pursue and verify if there are any Italians in those leads. We're eager to discover more. We're at 29 now.

To sustain further interest in positive imagery, I finally wrote a letter to the RAI Corporation asking for permission to show the Perlasca movie statewide. You know we have been researching who the copyright holder is, and we just hope RAI will grant us the dispensation. We anxiously await.

You know February is practically here, and so in that month CSJ gives pause to reflect on honorees at our annual brunch/dinner fundraiser at Russo's-On-the Bay whom we feel have

done so much to advance the noble causes of CSJ. This year we proudly honor Past Presidents Thom Lupo and Joe Rondinelli and GMM instructor Prof. Lou Leonini. Please come and demonstrate your solidarity and approval of CSJ's work. Such action will only incentivize us to work harder and get real results for the members of the Order and the whole Italian American community. If you haven't received the event package, contact me or call Chairwoman Josephine Morici Cohen at 631/345-6586, who will be chairing this event for an admirable 36th time!

Lastly, thanks to Executive Board Member Liz Rizzo, we have come in contact with a one Patrick Morelli who does free lectures for non-profit groups on how to fight bias and bigotry. He is a reputable author and sculptor and has worked directly with many celebrities in this country. I've investigated his resume' and have communicated with Pat about our interest in his expertise. He is high-powered and highly qualified to instruct us in being better fighters against bias and bigotry, and some time in February or March we will meet with him. We anxiously await the date, especially if we become trained in being more effective in what we do.

BIAS AND BIGOTRY ISSUES

We had enough of these issues this quarter that kept us rather busy. Early in the quarter we were approached by Matt Giuliano of the Petrosino Lodge about an incident in Hazlett, New Jersey where he resides. His daughter came home with a worksheet from school about "Clearing Up the Myths of Columbus." When examined, it did more to PERPETUATE the fictions of Columbus! The myths were enumerated on paper and "corrected" by typical revisionist views. What a travesty! Matt was so angered he contacted the teacher and the principal and upbraided both, whereupon the teacher withdrew the assignment and the principal apologized. I followed up with a letter to the principal thanking him for his sensibility and thereby avoiding the wrath of CSJ. I also offered to help improve the worksheet and make it more accurate, but the principal said that the assignment will never be given again. Such a development proves we have to be real forceful and demanding to get results.

Our wrath was heightened when thanks to Pat Greco of the Gulotta Lodge we were alerted of a Facebook post about the "Bensonhurst Dating Game" that we realized has been running for a pretty long time. It's a parody of the old "Dating Game" show, but it's so abominable that it's really racist and stars Joe Pesce and Chris Rock. Of course, the girl is portrayed as a typical "guidette" and the two bachelors act like city "guidos." Joe Pesce is the moderator who portrays the typical tough guy, and Chris Rock is the third bachelor. As the girl asks the questions, the Italian bachelors are gross and sexually suggestive. When Chris Rock, the Black man, does the same thing, Joe Pesce and the Italian bachelors rough him up. I assigned Terry Tanzer, our Webmaster on the Board, the duty of scratching the post from Facebook since he has been successful in doing that in the past. Facebook though just thanked him for responding, so we have to devise another strategy to eradicate this garbage.

Another incident lacking any redeeming value was an article in the December/January issue of AARP sent to us by Paul Gallo of the aforementioned TCA of NYC entitled "Old Fellas." Written by an Italian American, George Anastasia, it describes aging Italian mobsters in organized crime still undercutting legitimate businesses and committing crimes. When indicted, they

contrive dramatic illnesses in court due to their old age to avoid conviction and imprisonment, and sometimes they're successful! AARP has stooped this low when writing about aging issues! This article has absolutely no benefit to the readers. Since AARP is headquartered in D.C., I mailed this article to National CSJ President Kevin Caira to pursue, and if he wants NY help, we'll help.

Shifting upstate to District 8, Silvano Orsi, a member of the Executive Board, shared with us a Facebook post of a one Mike Marsocci from the Rochester area who does short reviews weekly on video of Italian restaurants in the area in broken English with an Italian accent. He literally acts like a greenhorn. You'd never know we came as far as we did! As distasteful as it was, I assigned this matter to Terry too. He made contact with Mike who had first was somewhat edgy about our request to terminate the videos, but since our intercession he hasn't done a video since. Terry said he would follow through by asking Mike if he finally terminated the videos. No sooner did we address this matter that another one surfaced in District 8.

There is a comedy show running right now in the Rochester area entitled "3Tenors," a takeoff on the actual concert known as the "Three Tenors," if you know. However, these three comics actually cannot sing, and Silvano who actually investigated the show before he alerted us said it was very funny and not defamatory against Italians at all. But in advertising the show the promoter uses fonts and images from the Godfather movie, which is what we object to. Thanks to Silvano's efforts we had a phone conference involving Silvano, Dr. Joe Rube', the District 8 CSJ Chairman, Russell Best, the promoter, and me. After about a half hour of conversation we reached a consensus. Since the show is running now till April, the advertising has already been forwarded to public outlets, but Russell did vow that any radio or TV interviews now until April and any promotions beyond April (if the show should go that long), he would definitely drop any references, fonts or images of the Godfather from the show's advertising. I assigned Silvano the task of monitoring the show until it keeps running and see if Mr. Best keeps his word. If not, we will contact him again, express our displeasure, and demand change.

However, beyond all the above we have a blockbuster emerging in Colorado right now! Richard SaBell, the Colorado CSJ Chairman, and Kevin Caira, our National CSJ President, have called upon the NYS CSJ to help them immediately about proposed legislation in the Colorado House of Representatives sponsored by Joseph Salazar to eliminate Columbus Day permanently starting next year. The Colorado Grand Lodge and CSJ is mobilizing forcefully and swiftly to meet this challenge. They've already had some strategy meetings and have asked filial lodges collectively and lodge members individually to barrage the reps with e-mails and letters. They have enlisted the ACLU for help, a lobbyist to monitor the legislation, and supportive Senators in the Colorado Senate for advice. The Denver Post newspaper is running a poll which shows that the Colorado populace is 2 to 1 in favor of keeping Columbus Day! Having noticed this momentum, we have organized an e-mail campaign of selected members of our Executive Board and District Chairpersons and Liaisons who are each assigned a rep to target in the State Veterans and Military Affairs Committee of the Colorado House where the bill has been introduced. Our aim is to defeat it right in committee before it gains any steam. We've covered every rep, and some of our CSJ people have already vigorously responded! I will monitor our people to make sure all are writing. SaBell and Caira are literally ecstatic with our strategy and action! WE WILL BEAT THIS!! We'll keep you updated. Hopefully our expected success will serve notice to other states to lay off the holiday.

This occurrence now broaches the subject of the "Save Columbus Day " petitions. More than ever we need to launch this campaign NOW! Coincidentally, Caira has had a meeting this past week about a decision with this petition drive once and for all, and we will finally discover what is National's position, especially in the context of Colorado, and may I say Seattle, Washington, where an Italian American groundswell now is simmering to get back Columbus Day there. I have already suggested to Kevin to create now a Columbus Truth Squad in which capable instructors and historians in the Order or outside fan out across the country and proactively make presentations to lodges, schools, and community groups about Columbus' momentous achievements. The intent is to arm the public about Columbus, define Columbus positively against the revisionists, and gain the upper hand. This action would also discourage elected officials from proposing damaging legislation against us. Kevin was to also introduce my idea at his Board meeting this past week. Hopefully it gets a positive response.

Respectfully submitted

Lou Gallo