

PLENARY SESSION REPORT

JULY 20, 2013

HOSTS

PER SEMPRE LODGE #2344
PER SEMPRE LADIES LODGE #2344A

LEVITTOWN HALL
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Appointment

At the New York State Grand Lodge Convention on Sunday, June 2nd, newly elected State President Joseph Rondinelli appointed me the new New York State Chairman of the Commission for Social Justice. I want to personally thank him for the appointment. It is undoubtedly the most challenging opportunity I have ever had in OSIA, and I accept it with gusto. Immediately the two of us have been meeting and working together as we both transition from the previous administration to this one. Subsequent to my appointment I earnestly began to record a host of strategies, activities, and plans to begin work and share with the Executive Board.

Transition-the Executive Board

I immediately was engrossed in creating a new Executive Board with what I consider to be twenty dynamos. These individuals in OSIA were selected by me because of their intellect, experience, creativity and passion, singularly or in combination. They are either returnees, experienced incumbents, or novices---a healthy assorted combination of those who will aid in maintaining tradition, but also a group which will be inventive in creating new ideas and paths for us to follow. No matter the composition they all are dedicated to the perpetuation of the missions of CSJ---fighting defamation and advancing positive imagery of Italians and Italian-Americans. They are as follows:

Lee Cerullo	Eleanor Jobbagy
Leo Cimini	Rocco Lanzilotta
Josephine Cohen	John Laruccia
Tony Corsello	Nat Mannino
Angela DeCosimo	Vincent Marmorale
Andy Filangeri	Liz Rizzo
John Fratta	Mike Santo
Jean Gagliardo	Terry Tanzer
Lou Gallo	Joe Vallone
Stella Grillo	Keith Wilson

It should be noted that consideration will be given to upstate involvement and participation on the Board too. Upstate District chairpersons from districts 4 to 8 are also included---Susan Alicea, Joseph DiCarlo, Carmine Federico, and John Yannotto. Appointments have to be made in 1 and 4. Both members of the above Board and these district chairpersons have also been asked to suggest any other upstate members they feel should also be included.

In fact, I will be considering Skype, video conferencing, floating venues, and personal visits by me over the course of the year to facilitate greater cohesion between upstate and downstate. Only then can we say that CSJ is a vibrant organ of OSIA!

In regard to the above Board I have selected the following as ministerial officers to date: Keith Wilson, Recording Secretary; Joe Vallone, Treasurer; Andy Filangeri, Financial Secretary; Mike Santo, Counsel. I have left vacant thus far the position of Vice-chair(s) until I determine what I want the role of the person(s) to assume this position(s) to be.

Transition-the Storage Facility

While the refashioning of the Executive Board was undertaken, I took the time to inventory our storage facility in Freeport. We have records stored from previous chairmen that are a treasure-trove of material from which to draw ideas and restore worthwhile programs. We have plenty of bookmarks for students, but we have to restock some pamphlets and posters and update our brochures. There's also much from our Medal of Honor program.

Transition-Finances

Once the Executive Board and the officers were intact, I turned my attention to CSJ finances. In this regard I want to graciously thank former Financial Secretary Richard Haemmerle for his interest, attention, expertise, and services in aiding the transition. He was extraordinary and indispensable in educating the new financial team and me about ALL things financial about CSJ.

I began by contacting Principal Trustee Angela DeCosimo to conduct a two-year audit since we now had a new chairman and Board. Thanks to Angela's team---State First Vice-president Carolyn Reres, State Orator Tony Naccarato, and District 2 State Trustee Gina Ferrara—a two-hour audit was conducted at the Columbus Lodge on July 16th. All accounts are in working order.

Subsequent to the above action, our financial team met with Rich at Chase Manhattan Bank in Bellmore to transition the savings and checking accounts to the new CSJ administration. Soon after, the team met again to fill out vouchers and pay new bills. The team has now settled and ready to begin work.

Next the Executive Board will implement an expense policy and establish a budget that we will report at the October plenary session.

Furthermore, as far as finances are concerned I have received from National CSJ 25 tickets for its \$100 raffle program to raise money. These tickets have been distributed to the Board and District Chairpersons to aid National in its quest, and they have already been very interested and diligent in selling said tickets. Thanks are definitely in order!

Programs to Date

Despite the necessity of transitioning our CSJ still managed to forge ahead with the mission of positive imagery and perpetuation of our admirable cultural heritage. Shortly after my appointment I was invited by District 3 Chairman Tony Corsello along with President Joe Rondinelli to attend an event at St. Clare Elementary School on Staten Island. National CSJ Chairwoman Tina Haemmerle brought to Tony's attention St. Clare's interest in establishing an Italian language program. Working with District 3 liaisons Carl Ciaccio and Frank Cicero, the district decided to grant \$1,000 from its treasury to aid the school in perpetuating the program from K to 6th grade. Thanks to Tony's efforts, he organized a

presentation and certificate at the school on June 11th. Father Capadanno lodge members on Staten Island Theresa Corey and Marcy Dabbene joined President Joe, Tina, Frank, Tony, and me for the presentation. We were treated to a lesson of first-graders reciting Italian, singing in Italian, and playing the game “Simon Says” in Italian! We took videos and pictures with the children and their teachers and were enthralled by the whole experience. Kudos to all involved, but particularly Tony Corsello is commended for engineering the whole event. In addition, at the first CSJ meeting at the Columbus Lodge on July 16th the new Board voted unanimously to appropriate another \$1,000 to advance the St. Clare program.

Carrying this energy further, I was asked to make a presentation on June 22nd at the mass of our annual Wreath-Laying Ceremony which commemorates our founding. I always felt that this event was an opportune time to show homage and respect to our Order Patron St. Francis of Assisi and Patroness Mother Cabrini and advance our cause of positive imagery, especially with these two remarkable historical Italian icons. I must say the presentation was well-received, and I thank Chairpersons Sylvia Summa and John Fratta for granting me this strategic opportunity.

Never ever forgetting this mission, I decided to charge two Board members who I know have the expertise to implement the following programs for the future. I have asked Nat Mannino to bring to the Board a program involving a tribute to Italian-American war veterans coupled with our Medal of Honor program at Sachem Public Library in Ronkonkoma on October 17th, a perfect insert for our Heritage Month celebrations. I have asked Leo Cimini to meet with Sal LaGumina and Fred Gardaphe’ to create a program involving literary artists. Besides the Italian language teachers these literati are doing a fabulous service in perpetuating the best of our cultural heritage, and I do think they deserve even more attention.

Concerning the acculturation of our youth, there has been surprisingly a setback. The Dr. Vincenzo Sellaro Lodge President Geraldine Iannello Graham approached me about her lodge’s interest in the Aurora Program, a comprehensive program created in 1984 that literally immersed young students in learning Italian and classical Roman and Italian history. She wanted some preliminary information before her lodge would commit to an investment in the program. When I contacted John Mancini from the Italic Institute, who owns the rights to the program, regarding her interest, he flatly told me that the program has been defunct for a little over one year. He told me personally that the program was depleted of money and support from other Italian organizations. I thought perhaps CSJ could somehow in the future help to revive this program.

First Meeting Under the New Administration

Amongst all this fanfare, we met as a new Executive Board on Tuesday, July 16th at a new location, the Columbus Lodge in South Farmingdale, an event I yearned for since my appointment. President Joe was also in attendance and contributed his thoughts and encouragement. Thank you Joe! The highlight of the meeting was two-fold. I personally offered my expectations of the Board and shared my leadership style and philosophy. I stressed that our operations would always be collegial and that management would be bottom-up from the Board, District Chairpersons, and Liaisons, not top-down. I would offer initiatives to the Board and the districts for their consideration and approval.

I would encourage discussion and debate that would culminate in a decision or compromise. A committee system will be organized and authority will be delegated. Chairpersons will not be micro-managed. They will be charged with a task and a goal and allowed to establish their own method of organization to achieve the goal. In other words, WE ALL OWN A PIECE OF THE ROCK!! WE ALL ARE INVESTED IN THE FUNCTION OF CSJ!! WE ALL ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DIRECTION AND SUCCESS OF THE ENTERPRISE!!

Secondly, Board members were asked to provide their own input as far as how we could improve CSJ and examine at this juncture the state of CSJ. What is right? Where have we failed? How can we improve operations, etc.? And the discussion was lively, particularly regarding our difficulty now in engaging the teachers of Italian to advance our culture because of the strains and anxieties of the new Common Core curriculum and voluminous testing and evaluation of students and teachers. At our next meeting in August the floor will again be open for discussion on whatever any other input Board members want to share. From this purposeful self-examination programs and strategies will be launched.

The Adam Haber TV Ad Issue

Finally, of course, with appropriate vigilance, we had to turn our attention to a sudden defamatory issue that tested us early-on in this administration. Adam Haber of Roslyn, running in a Democratic primary election campaign for Nassau County Executive against Thomas Suozzi, his Italian-American opponent, released a TV ad that maligned Suozzi by suggesting he associated with Soprano-types, the proverbial Italian stereotype. Thanks literally to a spontaneous herculean effort by State President Joe Rondinelli, National CSJ Chairwoman Tina Haemmerle, and me and the mobilization of our local lodge base Haber apologized and dropped the ad. His campaign manager resigned the next day. Undoubtedly, such a mass collaborative effort made this possible and should serve notice to anyone who would attempt such an endeavor ever again. Thanks so much for everyone's involvement and keep in mind that this kind of action will always be our modus operandi whenever defamation and stereotyping should emerge.

Summary

It's surely been quite hectic for two months! However, with a dynamic CSJ Executive Board and the unswerving support of President Joe and National CSJ Chairwoman Tina Haemmerle, I am so assured and confident in our quest to maintain and fulfill the missions of CSJ. Members are making the commitment and look at CSJ with renewed vitality and anticipation. They're all so wonderful! I am glad I took the mantle of leadership and accepted this monumental challenge.

Please remember we at CSJ do not have a monopoly on intelligence or creativity. No matter what your station or who you are in OSIA we would love to hear whatever suggestions you have to enrich CSJ. Our motto under my leadership will always be "sempre avanti e sempre insieme" (always forward and always together). Thanks so much for everything thus far.

Respectfully submitted,

Lou Gallo