

PLENARY SESSION REPORT

OCTOBER 26, 2013

HOST

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## **Transition-The Storage Facility**

The Executive Board has entertained changing the storage facility to a new location further east to accommodate members of the Board from western and eastern Long Island equally. Thanks to the efforts of Board member Jean Gagliardo a whole host of storage facilities was investigated and she presented her information at the September Board meeting. All of the facilities she has investigated are cheaper than the Freeport one. We now have to cobble together a committee to personally investigate the more attractive sites and make a recommendation to the Board for review. When we move, Jean will take inventory of what we have, and thanks to Treasurer Joe Vallone pictures were taken of all inventory for insurance purposes to keep on file in case of any loss and given to Jean. I will also appoint a Co-Chairperson to aid Jean in her new assignment.

## **Finances**

In my July plenary session report I mentioned that the Board would entertain an expense policy and a budget from August to the end of the fiscal year on March 31, 2014. The expense policy is incorporated in the budget, and the budget was approved by the Board at the September Board meeting. See attachment at the end of this report. Beginning in December Financial Secretary Andy Filangeri will show the actual revenue and expenditure amounts against the proposed budget as is done every quarter by the Grand Lodge at each of the plenary sessions, which of course is a responsible way to track one's budget over the fiscal year. In February the Budget Committee of the Commission will prepare a new budget for the 2013-2014 fiscal year to be presented to the Board at the March meeting in time to begin the fiscal year promptly on April 1.

Furthermore, at the August National Convention in Philadelphia, Pa. our national delegates pledged \$2,000 to the National CSJ in the name of our own Immediate National CSJ Chairman Tina Haemmerle as she ended her term. Our State CSJ Board wholeheartedly concurred and sent the money. Hopefully, this gift will boost the programs of the National CSJ.

## **New Appointments**

Over the course of the quarter I am proud to mention that all District Chairs have been filled now that I made appointments in District 1 and District 4. Charles Lucie, Immediate Past President of the Perry Como Lodge in Northport, L.I., has accepted the position in District 1. Soon after our first orientation meeting Charlie began work to fill liaison vacancies, appoint officers, select a meeting site, and call his first meeting. Great work Charlie! We have high hopes for Charlie since District 1 has been in the doldrums since liaisons haven't met since this past January. It is so admirable to discover Charlie has accepted the mantle of leadership with so much gusto.

At a Presidents meeting in District 4 this past quarter Mario Cermele, Past President of the Antonio Meucci Lodge in White Plains, has accepted the chairmanship. It is with great sadness when I say that Mario has contracted a medical problem and we wish him a speedy recovery in his new assignment.

## **Travel**

While on the subject of District business and enforcing my contention that I would forge ahead to make the CSJ a true statewide organization I have traveled to Districts 2, 3, and 4 over the last quarter.

We should all be so proud of our leadership and liaisons in these districts! Chairpersons Lee Cerullo (2), Tony Corsello (3), and District 4 have prepared agendas, and liaisons are very responsive and articulate regarding CSJ matters! There are no shrinking violets here! They are passionate and suggestive as far as what should be done. I really enjoyed myself at their meetings, and I cannot wait to visit the other districts too. Kudos to all and keep up the passion! Strong liaisons at the grass roots will make CSJ prominent in our local lodges and communities.

At each of these meetings I oriented our liaisons by presenting them with guidelines and responsibilities to follow to accomplish their tasks effectively and to make a worthy impact. CSJ pins were also distributed, and liaisons were encouraged to wear them to demonstrate their pride and to stimulate conversation with whomever they meet. Chairpersons and liaisons have communicated with me already over the quarter regarding paths and plans to follow as far as CSJ is concerned and have requested positive image materials for local projects. The bond between top management and grass-roots liaisons is now simmering!

### **New Brochure**

Thanks to the efforts of our District 3 Chairman Tony Corsello we have updated and printed our new CSJ brochure. We have dropped off some at the Grand Lodge office, and we have many at our Freeport storage facility. Anyone who needs a copy feel free to contact your liaison, District Chairperson, or an Executive Board member.

### **Website**

Thanks to the supreme diligence and efforts of Board member and Webmaster Terry Tanzer we now have an updated website that is also linked to the Grand Lodge website. Investigate and take note of our complaint directory page for one can register any derogatory or defamatory issue or event right on that page. We've already had someone from the public register a complaint about New York City Mayoral candidate Bill DeBlasio's comments about Columbus Day which we will respond to.

### **Positive Image Programs**

In this regard much has transpired. On August 4<sup>th</sup> CSJ spent \$1,000 to co-sponsor Italian Night at the Ducks game in Central Islip, L.I. with the Grand Lodge. Almost every inning the Grand lodge and CSJ logos were displayed, and CSJ set up a table with the Membership Committee distributing positive image materials to fans. President Joe threw out the first ball, pictures were taken with coach and part-owner Bud Harrelson, bocce ball and spaghetti-eating contests entertained the fans, and our delegation watched the game in one of the sky boxes. In addition, District 7 led by Chairman Carmine Federico also entertained an Italian Night in August with the minor league team the Syracuse Chiefs and positive image materials were distributed there too.

On September 15<sup>th</sup> thanks to the efforts of liaison Mona Splendore (2) and Board member Liz Rizzo CSJ set up a table on positive image materials at the Hofstra University Italian Festival in Uniondale, L.I. and much was taken.

At our September meeting Board member Vinnie Marmorale informed us that his documentary on Saving the Jews in Italy During WW2 is now completed. We hope in the near future to share this memorable classic with the members of the Order!

On October 8<sup>th</sup> I decided to cancel our regular Board meeting to capitalize on Italian Night sponsored by Nassau County Executive Ed Mangano. President Joe and the Grand Lodge Foundation were particularly honored and other reputable Italian-Americans were also awarded. Music was provided by Christopher Macchio and John Ciotta, and of course we were all feted by local Italian restaurants with a sumptuous fare for all! At this affair I made contact with Josephine Maietta of the Association of Italian American Educators (AIAE), and we decided that we would meet in November with the American Association of Teachers of Italian (AATI) and begin plans to develop a blockbuster program on Italian culture and language. I await this moment with great anticipation!

On October 17<sup>th</sup> Charles Lucie, District 1 Chairman, and I launched a Tribute to Italian-American War Vets at the Sachem Public Library in Holbrook, L.I. which was CSJ's contribution to our October Culture and Heritage Month. On October 1<sup>st</sup> at the library I personally decorated the downstairs gallery with our Medal of Honor Exhibit which will stand for the entire month for library patrons. Our library assistant for our vets program was Anne Marie Tognella, an Italian-American, who told me that the exhibit created quite an interest since our bookmarks and booklets were exhausted by library patrons. On the 17<sup>th</sup> the program began with a color guard provided by the Fischer-Hewins VFW Post #6249 from Rocky Point, L.I. led by Commander Joe Cognitore, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-president of the P. Vincent Landi Lodge. An introduction to CSJ was provided by me, and President Joe was introduced to describe the Hope for Warriors Project to help veterans who have special needs. An anthem was then read by me entitled "I am an American of Italian Descent" which demonstrated the influences that Italian men and women have made throughout world history. This reading was followed by a DVD about the Italian recipients of the Medal of Honor and more tribute readings to our soldiers. The highlight of the program was the testimonials by 9 separate local veterans of Italian descent, one of them being Peter Zuzolo, Past National and State President of the Order, who spoke of their war and service record. Certificates of Appreciation will be mailed to each of these veterans. I would like to note that also in attendance for this program was State Orator Tony Naccarato and Immediate Past National CSJ Chairwoman Tina Haemmerle.

It should also be mentioned that a host of thanks should be extended to District 1 Deputy Janice Sabilia who set up the same Medal of Honor Exhibit at the Smithtown Library for library patrons.

In fact, this whole project has spawned an interest in adding Reginald Desiderio and George Ferrari to our Medal of Honor Exhibit. Once it is documented that they are of Italian descent a biography and war record will be drawn up and added to the exhibit.

During this quarter I was contacted and invited by Dr. Arthur Flug of the Holocaust Center of Queensborough Community College to attend a seminar on discrimination and defamation on October 24<sup>th</sup> with my subject being a particular emphasis on Italian discrimination and defamation for college interns who are

studying the subject and meeting with law enforcement and not-for-profit organizations in the field. I shared with them that such subjects are multi-dimensional. Firstly, defamation encompasses a generational problem. Older generations tend to be victimized by defamation more because as early arrivals to this country they had to be acculturated because they were perceived as strange and alienating. As they are assimilated younger generations are not as victimized as much and so they lose their “Italianicity” and don’t feel the trauma. They see nothing wrong about freely using pejorative epithets like ginny, wop or dago. Secondly, the public or media dimension constantly portrays stereotypes because they are sensational and make money. Finally, the personal or private dimension occurs when one individual purposely hurls these epithets against another to disparage and hurt or incur humor. Dr. Flug and I then encouraged the interns to participate by asking them what solutions do they propose regarding the generational problem. They suggested that re-education and empathy of one to another must play a role if we are to conquer the problem. This session worked so well that Dr. Flug will invite me for another session later in the school term.

Lastly, I would like to report that our Board finally sent the matching contribution of \$1,000 to St. Clare’s Elementary School in Staten Island for its Italian language program. The letter of gratitude at the end of this report says it all. Thank you St. Clare! In fact, in a discussion I had with Principal Jo Rossicone we will be planning a session with the students, CSJ, and the parents in November to continue the cause!

### **The Complaint Directory**

All of you know that this part is our *raison d’etre*, and there’s more than enough for you to digest. Here are the more significant occurrences over the past quarter.

I’m sure most of you have heard by now of the “**Wandering Dago**” rambling food truck in Schenectady County selling a “dago”, “mick”, and polack” menu. It has gotten much attention in the news media and the courts. Two young Italian-Americans who own this truck were kicked out of the Saratoga Raceway and the Empire State Plaza in July by state officials because of complaints at these venues of the name of the truck. We immediately became involved and are hip-deep in this crisis! I ignited the lodge base and the Executive Board which responded forcefully as we attempted to urge the owners to drop the name of the truck. Our Counsel Mike Santo also took a position and began negotiations with the owners to do the same. As a result of these negotiations the owners decided to conduct a public poll to gauge public opinion on the issue. One week later they claimed they had majority support to continue the name and decided not to drop the name of the truck. So sadly baffled we decided to send a strong letter to Schenectady County legislators demanding that they order the Public Health Administrator to force the owners to drop the name if he or she has the power to do so, or withdraw their food permit for the truck. Eventually the matter was sent to the County’s legal department and we haven’t heard yet what the determination was. Shortly after, another incident in downtown Schenectady occurred with the truck. A food rodeo of the rambling trucks was to occur, but because of the WD truck the event was postponed. Consequently, a City Council meeting was called and at the meeting residents, including members of the Gabriele D’Annunzio Lodge and a councilman, complained about the truck. The mayor stated that it was necessary to review the use of the name of the truck before the rodeo could commence

once again. I wrote a letter to the mayor commending him for his action and a letter to the editor in the newspaper clamoring for the owners to simply drop the name on the truck and alleviate all of us of all their trouble. This action was followed by a lawsuit in federal district court in Albany by the owners against the state for breach of contract and their first amendment rights. Oral arguments were heard in late September and the presiding judge, Mae D'Agostino, quoted in the newspaper, said that she found the term very disturbing but first amendment rights are involved. We still yet await her decision. Once the case wound up in the court the Albany Times Union wrote an editorial critical of the heavy-handedness of state officials against the truck. I sent a response which was printed that stated that since the food permit was a privilege and not a right that the state as owners of the raceway and plaza could decide who could use their property or not.

And then a serendipitous event occurred! Peter Sparano of the D'Annunzio Lodge sent me a letter to the editor written by a one Chester Godlewski of the Polish National Alliance critical of the menu offered by the truck since it contained a "polack" menu. We now had an ally! However the lodge is having tremendous difficulty trying to locate Mr. Godlewski. We'd love to collaborate with his organization and build more strength regarding the issue. Hopefully, we will be successful.

As one can see we continue to monitor the situation in so many dimensions. I occasionally call the Schenectady County legislature and mayor's office to gauge the situation but I've gotten no response. We're trying to locate the Polish National Alliance and we await the court's decision. However, in all of this vortex kudos must go to Peter Sparano and the members of the D'Annunzio Lodge for their tireless and assiduous efforts in monitoring the situation, sending me news clips and e-mails, and calling me to keep us informed. They truly are our front line in this crisis and on behalf of the Board I offer a hearty THANK YOU!! Keep the news coming!

As the above story unfolded we had to turn our attention to the **Ally Bank Commercial**. This bank advertised an online banking service with no hidden fees. I received about 6 phone calls in a week's time about this one. One of the customers called the bank to investigate more information about the no hidden fees. He was rather uncomfortable with the arrangement because as shown in a flashback his father engaged in surreptitious organized crime killing. Of course the flashback had all the trimmings of Mafia behavior. We ignited the lodge base and responses were sent including my letter to the Chief of Communications of the company (an Italian-American!) and insisted the ad be dropped, and it was with an apology. My thanks to those who alerted me and responded!

At the **St. Gennaro Feast** a rather deplorable incident occurred that is worthy of attention. Past National and State President Joe Sciame sent me a video from the Italian American Journal depicting a Puerto Rican commentator of the show "Spic and Spanish" wandering around the feast looking for "hot Italian girls" and asking them sexually-suggestive questions about the comparison between sausage and braciolo and commenting that "Italians are the coolest white people." He even asked these girls how they felt about non-Italians attending the feast, obviously attempting to pit ethnic and racial groups against one another. The whole episode lasted 27 minutes and amounted to a sex romp for the commentator. Once again Board and lodge members reacted. The video was dropped on you tube, and I personally wrote to the video author to drop it in the Journal too. So far there's been no response to that demand.

Next my curiosity got the best of me and I viewed **2 movies** this quarter---“**Family**” and “**Don Jon.**” They were absolutely terrible as far as how Italians were portrayed! The characters in Family led by Robert DeNiro unleashed sadistic, violent urges if anyone crossed them and were pursued by equally dark and ominous figures out for revenge. Don Jon was an Italian-American porn freak hellbent in scoring with sexy, dissolute chicks.

I was so sadly dismayed about this trash that despite our endless pursuit in imploring and demanding movie moguls to halt these depictions it doesn't seem to matter. We really need another approach to obtain satisfying results! Therefore, I have just written to Dr. Manny Alfano of One Voice Coalition to encourage him and other Italian organizations to meet with me to discuss another approach. I hope he agrees and we can then set a new course.

Finally, I was contacted by District Chairman Carmine Federico about the **Syracuse Columbus Day Parade** which was marred by a one-woman protest against Columbus that made the papers, and to add insult to injury there was a teacher who complained to his seventh graders that he did not know why the schools were off for Columbus Day. “The only reason why Columbus got his money for his voyage was because he slept with Queen Isabella.” This stuff continues to boggle the mind! It's simply earth-shattering! Carmine is trying to locate the teacher to respond. What will be next?!

So, onward we trod struggling to present Italian-Americans in the best light possible. Be ever so vigilant about defamation and stereotyping and be so proud when that light shines upon us.

Respectfully submitted,

Lou