

PLENARY SESSION REPORT

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HOST

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## SEPTEMBER

September was an active month. Representing CSJ, Treasurer Joseph Vallone and I marched in the San Gennaro Feast Procession on September 12th in New York city to show support for this society which does so much to keep Italianita' alive and well in Little Italy as a powerful force. The outpouring of ethnic pride was astounding, particularly at the booths along the roadways, and we were so pleased to be a part of it.

CSJ also took a prominent role at the annual Hofstra University Conference sponsored by the Association of Italian American Educators (AIAE). Other Italian American interest groups were also in attendance. When I took the podium, I reviewed the missions of CSJ and then proceeded to review some of the positive and negative developments that have arisen lately in which CSJ played a part. I also sold to the attending public the little red booklets entitled "What Italy Has Given the World" written by former CSJ honoree Gaetano Cipolla, which encourages the reader to imagine a world without Italy's legacy. I also set up a display exhibiting our positive image material on Italian icons and accomplishments. I really felt our presence resonated with the attendees since many approached me about the red booklets and bought them.

Speaking of enthusiasm, NYCSJ began a connection with the new National CSJ President Kevin Caira of Massachusetts. Thanks to the work of District 1 CSJ Liaison Charles Lucie and lodge liaisons, "Save Columbus Day" petitions were drawn up for a ground campaign and sent to Kevin for review. He did tell us that such petitions would be offered online again like last year, which should greatly aid us in achieving 100,000 signatures to be taken seriously by the Presidential administration in Washington, D.C. Charles and I were even invited on the John LaBarca radio program "Italian House Party" to create interest and concern about the issue. So, we await Kevin's evaluation very anxiously.

Our wrenching anxiety was heightened by two more succeeding developments. Firstly, the New York Daily News printed a picture series on September 16th of the San Gennaro Feast in history. Inserted within the series were two pictures that had absolutely nothing to do with the history of the feast! One depicted mobster John Gotti arriving at his club in Little Italy, and the other showed a picture of Umberto's Restaurant where mobster Joey Gallo was gunned down. Despite the fact that CSJ has lambasted NYDN constantly regarding such coverage in their articles, reporters still slog on with deleterious images of Italian criminals. A scathing response to the paper was written by me expressing our continuous exasperation with such reporting by the NYDN. Further and more provocative action is being planned to nip this coverage once and for all! Secondly, the New York Times was no better! Immediately after the death of icon Yogi Berra, a reporter wrote what seemingly was an ode to Yogi about his glory as a baseball star until the paragraph about Yogi's anatomy was described as "apelike" and "Neanderthal." You know such appellations like these applied to present-day minorities would mean an automatic retirement for the reporter! Once again, I wrote a scathing response to the NYT demanding an apology for such action. I'm still waiting.

On the subject of writing, I asked two CSJ Executive Board members Jean Gagliardo and Liz Rizzo to dispatch letters to all public libraries in Nassau and Suffolk Counties urging them all to provide some activity or event commemorating Italian Culture and Heritage Month in October. Thanks to District 5 Chairwoman Susan Alicea we were able to obtain contact information for all public libraries in the state including New York City, which we will utilize next year to unleash an outburst of cultural energy in this state during that month for us and the public at large.

Enhancing Italian culture took another turn. Thanks to the volunteerism of District 2 Caboto Lodge Liaison Janet Galvin, our Medal of Honor Kits are just about updated. We've included four more MOH recipients in the kit: Jared Monti, Reginald Desiderio, George Ferrari, and Salvatore Giunta. Janet, working with GL Editor Salvatore Moschella, created the citations and

pictures for each recipient. All just have to be fitted for the frames, and everything will be ready. Thanks so much Janet and Sal! We've also secured another list of recent MOH recipients, and Janet will cull the list for anymore Italians or Italian Americans to be included in our kits.

Another research project has had us frustrated for months, but thanks to Executive Board member Vincent Marmorale and Professor of Italian at Suffolk Community College Annamaria Monaco-Hernandez we cracked the case. For months we tried to locate the copyright holder of the movie "Perlasca." Thanks to a combination of Vinnie's and Annamaria's connections we discovered that the copyright holder was the Italian TV heavyweight the RAI Corporation. We want RAI to give us the permission to show this movie statewide to Italian and Jewish groups because it depicts such a positive image of Italians during the tragic days of the Holocaust during WW2. Writing to RAI in Italian, Annamaria learned and told us we had to write a formal letter under CSJ letterhead expressing our wishes and naming our show dates. There may be a fee. Once we tackle these matters we will be well under way to launch our quest!

Another quest is on the march! Doug Gladstone, the author of the book Carving A Niche For Himself (about the work of Luigi Del Bianco, the chief carver at Mount Rushmore in the 1930s) and I have been more actively engaged lately in urging the National Park Service to give more prominent recognition to Luigi. Doug has been communicating with Park officials, and I had a conversation with Patricia Trap, the Deputy Director of the Midwest Section of the NPS. We're urging said officials to direct the Rangers to mention Luigi as the chief carver in their tours, and we want a monument near the sculpture acknowledging Luigi's work. I was fortunate also to speak directly with Lou Del Bianco, Luigi's grandson, about CSJ's efforts in supporting his quest. Lou has asked me to write a letter to the head of the NPS to lobby for the cause which could help him when he meets with NPS officials very soon. The new Director of NPS, Cam Sholly, we find to be much more agreeable to our interest which has buoyed Lou's hopes for his grandfather. Time will tell!

We closed out the month with a meeting with State Education Chairwoman Grace Ferrara on September 30th. Once our new State President Carolyn Reres acceded to the presidency, she created a new Education Committee in the state. Consequently, she advised that the CSJ Italian Language Task Force's work be transferred to the Education Committee. Therefore, Grace and I met to develop a transition between the two groups, and Grace can now initiate any actions relative to education and the Italian language on her own.

## **OCTOBER**

October was a festive month. Upon my urging, right on October 1st Supervisor of the Town of Brookhaven Ed Romaine at a Town Board meeting proclaimed the month of October Italian Heritage and Culture Month. OSIA National and State officers who live in Brookhaven Town and lodges whose meeting place is in Brookhaven were honored with proclamations. Some Town Councilmen spoke of their Italian lineage with pride, and I was able to use the occasion to describe the work and mission of CSJ. It was a great opportunity to showcase a positive image of Italian people.

No sooner did the above happen, I received a phone call from County Executive Steve Bellone's staffer, Grace Ioannidis. She said the County Executive was interested in launching a Heritage and Culture event just like last year. I recruited a Planning Committee consisting of State Culture Chairwoman Diana Grauer, District 1 State Trustee Geri Iannello-Graham, District

1 CSJ Chairman Charles Lucie, and CSJ Executive Board member Liz Rizzo. Very soon after, work began with the Planning Committee and the County Executive's staff. It was decided that the event would take place on Thursday, October 29th from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Dennison Building on Vets Highway in Hauppauge, and that the program would be as diverse as possible within the time allotment. A flier will be sent out, and if you have the time, please come. Food will be available. Proclamations will be distributed to Italian American honorees who live in Suffolk County.

While these developments were occurring in Suffolk County, our attention also turned to a long-simmering issue to our west. In the Diocese of Brooklyn Monsignor Alfred LoPinto had met with newly-elected Assemblywoman Latrice Walker on a tour of Our Lady of Loreto Church, promoting the demolition of the church. Because Walker was recently installed as the new Assemblyperson in the district, Mario Toglia, an avid advocate for the church's preservation, has contacted Walker to have her see his power point presentation on OLL. Mario contacted me to urge us to help bolster the preservation argument. Consequently, on October 13th the CSJ Executive Board approved a motion to have me write a letter to Ms. Walker to do just that. It is also our interest to contact local community groups in the area to gauge their feelings about their use of the church as a community center of some sort. It would be a win-win-win for all those concerned. The church would not have to worry about demolition and could dismiss themselves from the issue. The community groups would actually use the building for their own benefit, and CSJ would be satisfied because a unique edifice with cast stone technology built by the physical hands of Italian immigrants over a century ago would be preserved! Furthermore, the New York State Landmark Conservancy wants the building preserved and would help in that quest! Stay tuned for further developments as they unfold.

Despite these wrenching issues, when we think of October, we naturally think positively about Columbus Day and our reflection on our Italian heritage and culture. This year was no different, of course. CSJ lodge Liaisons, Executive Board members and I took part in four celebrations. In each one I dressed in costume as Christopher Columbus to bring demonstrative attention to this great Italian icon and force people who saw me to remember his great accomplishment as an Italian. We all know that because of his context in history, our people enriched his commemoration with festivals, Italian cultural displays and parades all over this country! Consequently, it was a pleasure playing Columbus. We took part in laying a wreath before a Columbus statue in downtown Huntington, Long Island, which was followed by an enthralling parade three days later. Staten Island with its conglomeration of display booths, food stations, and the energetic entertainment of Louie Prima, Jr., was especially very festive. The New York City parade was packed with hordes of participants, lavish floats, and a constantly cheering crowd. What a weekend to be Italian—a show of pride and solidarity that hopefully will be everlasting in the face of those revisionists who want the Day eliminated.

On that score I was invited to appear on a radio podcast on October 7th produced by DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois. The podcast involved an investigation by Radio DePaul of the issues surrounding Columbus Day, and you know what my position was! If you are interested in listening to the 30-minute show, contact me by e-mail, and I will give you the contact information. We in CSJ must be ever so vigilant regarding the literal assaults on this man's legacy, and wherever and whenever defend his accomplishment that means so much to Italian Americans everywhere.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lou Gallo, NYS CSJ Chairman