

New York State Commission for Social Justice
2019 Winter Plenary Session
Report

Brothers and Sisters;

I want to thank all our Brothers and Sisters and I would like to wish you all a very Happy and Healthy New Year.

CSJ Luncheon

This year's luncheon will be held on February 24th at Noon at Russo's on the Bay in Howard Beach. This year's honorees are Carol Sorace Whalen, the Grand Niece of Dr. Vincenzo Sellaro, Carol Delaney, noted author of Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem, and Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, a man that has been fighting social justice issues for many years.

Please make your reservations for this luncheon, the tickets are \$95.00 each. I want to extend my sincere thanks to the chair of this luncheon, Josephine Morici Cohen, who has been chairing this event for thirty-eight years.

Update on our efforts to preserve Columbus Day and our Statue

The fight continues to defend and preserve our Columbus holiday. We continue to be under attack by those that have very little knowledge of Columbus and his great voyage. One of those now in attack mode is the newly elected Congresswomen from Queens and the Bronx, Alexandra Ocasio Cortez. She has an online petition to remove Columbus as a holiday and make election day a paid holiday. She is also going to present a bill in congress regarding this issue. We already sent her a letter and received no

response. I will be attempting to make an appointment with her to speak to her directly regarding the importance of Columbus to our Italian American community.

In Southampton, we are continuing to work with the residents to overturn the school board's decision to change Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples day. Once again, CSJ took out a full-page ad in the Southampton Press informing the community of this position and demanding that it be reversed. The Southampton community, under the leadership of Rocco Corriero, are seeking candidates to run for the school board in May, that support Columbus Day. We need to win just one more seat to be able reverse this decision.

In Rochester, the City decided to remove Columbus Day from the calendar. The Vincent Lombardi Lodge has been on the forefront fighting this decision. CSJ did send a letter to Mayor Lovely Warren objecting the removal of Columbus Day. I received a letter back from the mayor stating that they still have Columbus Day on their calendar. We are follow-up with the Lombardi Lodge to find out what was the final decision.

CSJ is continuing to demand that any attacks on Columbus statues should be considered a hate crime. I have spoken to Kevin Caira and asked him to write to the Attorney General to make these crimes hate crimes across the Country. I am waiting to hear back from him.

Columbus, as Taught in the Schools

We are beginning to investigate the false narrative taught in the public schools regarding Columbus. I set-up a sub-committee chaired by Lou Gallo to look into this situation. We are looking to schedule meetings with the State Council of History Teachers, the Bureau of Social Studies, the Board of Regents, the State Council of School Superintendents and the school text book publishers. We

are also looking into setting up booths at Social Studies Conferences and locate supportive journalist of our cause.

New Orleans Lynching's Effort

We are continuing to work with the Mayor's Office in New Orleans to have a public apology made regarding the 1891 New Orleans lynching's. So far, we are getting very positive responses from the Mayor's Office. We have sent verbiage of an apology that we would like her to make and her office sent it back with some changes. Mike Santo is going to New Orleans the end of January to meet with the City Officials and finalize this initiative. He will also be meeting with community leaders there, as well as city officials, to site an area where a memorial can be placed. We are very please with the results and remain optimistic that an apology will be made by March 14, 2019.

I want to publicly thank Mike for all the hard work he has done on this issue.

Attacks of New York Chief Judge Janet DiFiore

On October 23,2018 at a Hispanic Celebration the unions representing the Court Officers and court employees had their members demonstrating against Judge DiFiore. They wore tee-shirts with the words Organized Crime Association. I want to make it clear, we are not getting involved in their labor management issue; the only issue we are dealing with is their use of the term Organized Crime Association against an Italian American. We did send a letter to both union heads objecting to this tactic but have not received a response.

CSJ has updated our complaint report and directory. This new form was sent to all lodge presidents to be copied and given to all

members. We are asking our members to use this form when notifying us of issues.

Positive Image

John Dabbene Immigrant Contest

We have received 21 essays from six of the eight lodges across the State. The committee will be reviewing the essays and a decision will be made in February as to the winning contestants. In March the awards will be distributed. We are urging all lodge presidents to inform both myself and President Ferrito of the dates that you will be giving out the checks.

I want to thank Charlie Lucie for taking the lead in implementing this program.

La Bella Lingua Award

Every district across the state was notified in January, with the applications for the LaBella Lingua program. Many of the districts have already sent this information to the schools in their district that teach the Italian language. The Grand Lodge underwrites this award with a \$500.00 check for each winner in each district. A \$50.00 check will also be given to each district to pay for the mailing and photocopying of the forms and information.

In addition, the SCJ will be issuing a up to \$150.00 to each district to help pay the costs of the awards ceremony. I want to thank Mary Ann Rispoli and Jean Gagliardi for all they do in implementing this program.

In closing, I am urging all to stay united and involved in our fight to defend our heritage. If you hear of any issues negatively affecting our heritage, please get it to us ASAP.

Our CSJ is only as great as the brothers and sisters on our executive board and our lodge liaisons. Each of them is totally committed to defending and promoting a positive image of our heritage. I thank each of them.

Brothers and Sisters, I want to thank you for your support to CSJ.

Fraternally,

John A. Fratta