

PLENARY SESSION REPORT

FEBRUARY 1, 2014

HOST

CONSTANTINO BRUMIDI LODGE #2211

2075 DEER PARK AVENUE
DEER PARK, NEW YORK 11729

Long Term Goals

As the new year unfolded I automatically became very pensive about what long term goals CSJ should strive for now that our transition from the previous administration was fully complete. I settled on three: 1) create a solid relationship together with other ethnic and racial groups to combat deleterious discrimination and stereotyping 2) create strong, durable positive image programs to offset negative imagery of Italians in print and broadcast media and 3) make CSJ more well-known to the general public. I promptly then sent out an agenda to all district chairpersons, the Executive Board, and state officials, which becomes our blueprint to follow in the coming year that reflects these goals.

These goals are what we will measure our work and evaluate our success now and for the future, and I think as one reads this report one will find that we are moving in these directions now. So, it is time to forge our path with this new CSJ administration.

The New Storage Facility

I am pleased to announce that this development was our last effort that completed the transition. A task force consisting of Jean Gagliardo, Leo Cimini, and I investigated physically the storage facilities that Jean had proposed for review. We recommended A Space Place on New Highway in Farmingdale, off Route 110, and brought the suggestion to the Commission members who approved it. Jean, Leo, and I moved in on December 9. I then appointed Jean and Leo to be our Quartermasters for the new unit. It's much more centrally located for our members, and we are saving \$53 per month including insurance. Jean and Leo now just have to arrange our slew of positive image materials in a much more organized fashion.

Travel

Thanks to CSJ District 5 Chairwoman Susan Alicea, we organized a meeting in Garnersville in Rockland County including lodge presidents and deputies. I focused my presentation on developing a strong district grass-roots operation, providing guidelines for liaisons regarding their responsibilities, and encouraging all to convince students of Italian to take the Advanced Placement Italian program.

District 5 lodges do not have liaisons, so Susan's main task right now is to urge all lodge presidents to select liaisons for the district, find a meeting place, and focus on the agenda I set out for all district chairpersons at the beginning of the year. Good luck Susan!

At this meeting I approached NYS Scholarship Chairwoman Michelle Ment and suggested that we work together to sustain a strong AP program and do our part to keep it alive.

I have also requested from District 6 Chairman Joseph DiCarlo to set up a meeting soon, hopefully with liaisons, where I can share personally the same presentation as I did with District 5.

Our total intent is to begin to build that strong grass-roots apparatus to do our work at the local level and create a real strong state CSJ.

Positive Image Programs

We spent a lot of time this quarter in this sphere with great results. I began in the fall with my "History in a Box" program presented to the Italian Club at Parkway Elementary School in East Meadow, Long Island, involving over eighty diverse, energetic children. The theme is many Italians in history have influenced so much of our daily living. The enthusiasm was overwhelming! They were so attentive and eager to participate! Every opportunity I get to present this program I will. At a young age the children learn firsthand and visibly the contributions Italians have made in our lives. For organizing this event I want to thank Board member and Immediate Past National CSJ Chairwoman Tina Haemmerle and teacher Anne Marie and assistant Melissa.

In this vein District 3 Chairman Tony Corsello and I will be preparing a children's program with St. Clare's Elementary School in Staten Island in April, and I received a call from the Lawrence School District Superintendent on Long Island regarding an Italian language and culture program starting every Wednesday after

school till April in the Inwood and Cedarhurst elementary schools. Of course, I've committed CSJ to the program and will volunteer my time in February. I will encourage members of the CSJ Board and the Order to participate in order to make CSJ gain footholds in the local communities and be an advocate for Italian culture and language.

During this quarter we turned our attention to the saga of Our Lady of Loreto Church again. Members of the Board were animated at the inertia thus far regarding the church's future. The Board decided that a letter and petition be written and reviewed by the Board, President Joe and Joe Sciame to Bishop DeMarzio about our concerns regarding its preservation and actions to be taken. I want to thank Board members Liz Rizzo, Mike Santo, and Keith Wilson for their due diligence in this matter, and we await the reactions of President Joe and Past National and State President Joe Sciame.

While involved with all the above, we were suddenly alerted to a situation in October in the Greece School District, a suburb of the city of Rochester. A teacher of Italian in its schools, Lino Pizzolanti, contacted Jennifer Rube', President of the Vincent Lombardi Lodge and CSJ Board member, about the possible steady erosion of the Italian language program in Olympia High School. The school district in its course selection booklet did not include Level 1 Italian. This development is serious business!

Once Level 2, 3 and 4, and AP students graduate there is no feeder program below (Level 1) to move up and continue the program. Eventually the language program would be eliminated and Italian would be lost in a district 30% Italian due to budget cuts. Jennifer notified me of the case, and we sprung into action.

I personally called Lino and was briefed on all the details. I then organized a campaign targeting the November 12 school board meeting to make our case. Jennifer organized her lodge members, Lino organized the teachers, and I contacted Franca Cinelli who organized the residents. Once I learned from Lino that Adam Crandall, a sitting school board member who took Italian for five years in the district as a student, was foursquare behind our effort, I called him and asked that he sensitize the rest of the Board about our concerns. On the night of November 12 the school board announced that they were re-instituting Level 1 Italian in the 7th grade at Olympia High School (our goal!) before all our constituencies present! Some within the groups were so elated they joined as members of the Vincent Lombardi Lodge!

This effort proves that if we all stick together in a common cause we can never be defeated! So, if you receive an e-mail or facebook post regarding a CSJ matter, GET INVOLVED PLEASE! We need each other. What little one may do in conjunction with the aggregate speaks volumes, as one can see.

Equipped with this success we turned our attention to opening new channels for this administration. In preparation for our annual brunch/dinner/dance at Russo's On the Bay I contacted two groups which I think do so much to promote Italian culture and asked they be honorees at this affair. They accepted.

Arba Sicula ("Sicilian Dawn") for 34 years has promoted Sicilian history, language and culture throughout the world with 1,800 members. Most know of them at the Hofstra Italian Festival in September, where every year they congregate, and as writers and poets recite their work before an audience. AATI-LI (American Association of Teachers of Italian-Long Island) provides three dimensions in one for our local private and public schools--- culture and history instruction through language study. It is fitting therefore that we honor these persons for without them---the writers, poets, and teachers---we would have a very difficult time sustaining our culture and traditions for posterity. Let's elevate them to a position they so rightly deserve, and we will do that on February 16th. Please come.

Besides Italian groups it is my goal and dream to initiate efforts with other ethnic and racial groups to truly build an institution of solidarity. So, I met with B'nai B'rith leaders Margaret Goldberger, Deanna Friedman, and Metro North President Harold Mitchell, our counterpart, over lunch in Hicksville, Long Island, and we clicked so well! Even though we agreed that the Order and BB are aging, we still felt we could build a solid relationship with interested persons in each group and collaborate together. They shared with me a project that peaked my interest that I've heard of before---Project HOPE--- a program that feeds needy Jewish people at Passover. It is something we could do with people around Christmas or Easter. They've invited me to the launching of this year's operation in April, and I intend to go. Thanks to Board member Liz Rizzo who discovered a film "Perlasca" about Giorgio Perlasca, an Italian who saved 5,000 Hungarian Jews during WWII, we decided to launch our new inchoate efforts by getting the film and showing it to both OSIA and BB. Stay tuned! Liz swears it's really gripping!

Another development this quarter that I saw could be an opportunity for CSJ as far as positive imagery was the absorption of the District 1 Lodges' effort in launching a culture festival in June. Since we have more resources and members of the District Committee are also CSJ members I requested of the District lodge representatives and CSJ Board members that we become the lead sponsor of the project. Both agreed. The festival date is Saturday, June 28th and will take place at the Frank Brush Barn property on Route 25 in Smithtown. So please, mark your calendars. We are steadily building a great event! This event has been a dream of mine for four years now, and I am sure this will be the capstone of positive imagery in the year 2014!

If all remember, Board member Vincent Marmorale has finally produced his long-running documentary "Saving the Jews in Italy." Vin has decided now to make snippets of the documentary for use in public schools all over. Again, this is a tremendous move to share at the grass-roots level and for young minds the history and the character of Italian people well before they become interested in or influenced by pejorative stereotypes. Thank you Vin!! We will make sure this effort is popular.

Sadly, another threat is before us we learned just recently. I was contacted and informed by an alumna of Mother Cabrini High School in Manhattan that the school is in danger of closing after this school year, and they crave for our help! I do not have to tell anyone in our Order how serious this development is and who Mother Cabrini is. I will bring this matter before the Board at our February meeting to discuss the matter and hopefully devise a strong plan of action, if any. The situation is dire. They're going to try to raise \$7 million. The tuition for each girl in the all-girls school is \$8,400 per year. I have already reached out to Jack Abruzzo of the Giuseppe Nigro Lodge in Islip since Jack was a board member there for seven years who shared with me the above information. I would hate to see such a loss of an institution founded by our patroness of the Order. Her legacy is now in crisis in Manhattan. For that reason alone I think we have to do something, and the alumnae do want to hear from us. If anyone has any ideas, please share them with Board members or me. Thank you.

Defamation and Stereotyping

Of course, this topic is our second mainstay, and there have been some notable occurrences. After all, does it ever stop?

Every October we are subjected to the annual assaults on the legacy of Columbus, and this year was no different. I personally and assiduously responded to the egregious and classic distortions. Mayor-to-Be at the time Bill DeBlasio made some denigrating remarks before the NYC Columbus Day Parade that showed his knowledge of history was wanting. My lengthy response of course was not answered. Two periodicals, The Trentonian in New Jersey and the Mamaroneck Review, contained articles that ignited a response from me. L.A. Parker of the Trentonian and a letter to the editor in the Mamaroneck Review by a one Clifford Jackson, spurred a round of e-mails and phone calls I found very challenging. Both received from me the piece produced by our National CSJ "Columbus: Fact or Fiction," which by the way was also forwarded to each Board member for information purposes.

So, please be aware every October of the periodic Columbus assault in the print and broadcast media. Send any such information to one's District Chairman, a member of the Board, or me. We will respond if we think it's worth it! No one will protect his legacy but us, so if you obtain any information that educates you on his history, read and study it! In this manner we can be fully equipped to respond vigorously to these distortions.

The Wandering Dago truck has hit the news most recently. Thanks to the vigilance of Board member and Counsel Mike Santo he shared the following information with me. The judge assigned to the case Mae D'Agostino (love that name!) has decided that before she will rule on the breach-of-the-first-amendment-rights of the plaintiff WD she requests of each side (NYS and WD) information of what a public forum is, particularly in reference to the Saratoga Raceway and the Empire State Plaza, where WD was dismissed. Only then she recently stated will she be able to rule. Mike has decided on a tack that he would write an article in the Law Journal, which is read by lawyers and judges, suggesting the direction she should take, which hopefully will help us. This part of the lawsuit is critical for us because it will decide whether WD or anyone for that matter can use slurs in a commercial enterprise. Keep your fingers crossed and stay tuned!

Even the reputable and popular Aflac Corporation has now bruised us. For those of you who have seen the commercial it's the usual Mafioso stuff. The laughter is after some research done by me I discovered that Fortune Magazine has declared Aflac the Most Admired and Ethical Company in America, and their CEO Dan Amos has received an anti-defamation award called the Torch of Liberty from a Dr. Martin Luther King foundation or organization! I guess Italians are just fair game but Afro-Americans are protected. Believe me, I sent out a facebook post to the company about my laughter. I want to thank Board and Order members for their e-mails and facebook posts to the company as a follow up to me. Sadly though, Aflac has not responded to us or any other nationwide Italian organizations so I've learned! Consequently, President Joe asked me to call National President Tony Barrata, who in turn asked me to call a Lou Rago of the Italian American Human Relations Foundation of Chicago. He asked us to take part in a nationwide phone campaign on Friday, January 31st from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. to two local Aflac agencies in New Jersey and Chicago to express our displeasure of the ad and the lack of response to our concerns. Besides this foundation and CSJ, the National Italian American Bar Association and the Italic Institute of America, are also participating. I find such a coalition so engaging, and I hope we are successful in the campaign because it will dispel the perpetual notion that sometimes Italians do not bind together in a crisis.

That leaves us with the reality shows. The latest blockbuster is "the Capones" on the REELZ channel 177 at 10 p.m. every Tuesday that premiered on January 28th. Members of the Board and the Order were asked to view the show and provide me with their comments. It's the usual portrayal of profane, excitable Italian female shrews and literally dumb, oversexed male buffoons. I really think this show is so amateurish it will not last long. I'm interested now in fielding comments on the show before we take any action. I have the necessary parties to contact.

Lastly, in my quest to make NYSCSJ more well-known I noticed in the recent Italian Magazine that there were issues we've worked on in the past that gave no credit to NY, namely WD and the Ally Bank commercial. I promptly sent a lengthy e-mail to National CSJ Chairman Carlo Carozzi and magazine Editor Dona DeSanctis about our dedicated involvement in these issues. We were commended by them for what we've contributed, and both requested that I send them any matters we're working on to them. I forwarded them the Aflac Corporation nationwide phone campaign. Hopefully, we will get credit for our participation in the next issue of the magazine and beyond, especially if our campaign is so successful.

So, onward we endure! There's hardly a dull moment as time goes on, and one never knows what will ever turn up next. SEMPRE AVANTI!!

Respectfully submitted,

Lou Gallo