

President's Corner  
CSJ President's Message

The month of October – Italian Culture Month – included our Empire Lighting Ceremony, a dedication ceremony in Mineola, NY, several parades, many meetings and events – all in honor of our wonderful Italian Heritage. Even though the New York State Governor and the United States President have declared October to be Italian Heritage Month, it always amazes me that many people think of October as Hispanic Heritage Month, which actually runs from September 15 to October 15<sup>th</sup>.

It was brought to our attention that the United Federation of Teachers featured a full page on Hispanic Heritage Month in their publication. They were not aware that the month of October was Italian Heritage Month, and welcomed our positive image material. Hopefully they will acknowledge this fact in October 2007. We also sent along a copy of our Italian American Women's Poster, with the suggestion that it be utilized during Women's History Month in 2007.

We were also advised that the History Channel featured a segment on Hispanic Congressional Medal of Honor recipients. We notified them of our Italian American Medal of Honor recipients and provided them with information on this program, with the request that they feature a future segment on this issue.

On November 4, 2006 the National CSJ held its First Annual Positive Image Awards Luncheon at the New York Hilton. New York State OSIA and CSJ were well represented. The 2006 CSJ Lifetime Achievement Award was presented Justice Frank J. Montemuro, Jr., OSIA National Past President & Founding President & Chair, CSJ and the 2006 Positive Image Award was presented to Lawrence E. Auriana, Chairman, Columbus Citizens Foundation. We were all very proud to join with these very worthy members as they received well-deserved accolades.

On October 14, 2006 there was an all-day symposium at St. John's University, *Dimensions of the Italian American Experience*. Among the interesting speakers, Santina Haemmerle addressed the audience on the functions of the CSJ. The audience was extremely interested in our involvement with many issues concerning bigotry and stereotyping. We also provided a display of our positive image material, which was purchased and distributed to attendees. Importantly, many people became interested in the Order and we were able to provide them with membership applications.

I also represented the CSJ as a panel member of a program concerning the Italian Internment, held by the *Italian American Labor Council*. Also on the panel were Joseph Scelsa, Italian American Museum and Sarah Goodyear, Granddaughter of Ezio Pinza, who had been interned during World War II. The audience was captivated by the information that was brought forth concerning "Una Storia Segreta." It also enabled me to discuss the CSJ, who we are and what we do.

On October 17, 2006, a program entitled. "The Banality of Good" Rescuers in Italy at the Time of Persecution, was presented at the Center for Jewish Studies in New York City. Walter Wolff was among the panel members, which included Italian and Jewish historians, survivors and rescuers, in Italy during the Holocaust. It was brought out that Italy was the ONLY country that accepted the Jewish refugees. Italian citizens not only saved Jewish/Italian Citizens, but refugees who sought safety in Italy. As usual, Walter captivated the audience with his story. He thanked the CSJ and OSIA for our support.

Only last week I was contacted by an Italian American student from Hofstra University. The subject of one of her term projects was *Italian American Stereotyping*. I agreed to meet with her to be interviewed concerning this subject – as it was a wonderful outlet to reach other students at Hofstra.

The young lady was very disturbed that most of her fellow students thought that her family must be mob related, because she was Italian American. We had a very lengthy discussion about negative stereotyping, Italian Heritage, CSJ and OSIA, which she taped. I also provided her with our positive image material and the OSIA and CSJ web site information. It is sad that our young people have been stigmatized by the negative stereotyping – thanks to Hollywood, the Godfather series and the Sopranos.

As I have indicated previously, negative stereotyping constantly perpetrated by the media has long tentacles. During this last election, several political campaign ads featured *Sopranos' like* characters spouting criminal innuendoes about a candidate. A news commentator publicly, on television, denounced the ads, on behalf of all Italian Americans.

The NYC Mayor's Department of Film, Theatre and Broadcasting had planned a 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary dinner at Snug Harbor in Staten Island – the theme – *Made in NY: Godfather Dinner – A Dinner You Can't Refuse* – encouraging attendees to come dressed as their favorite Godfather outfit. We immediately contacted the Mayor's office, other Italian American Organizations and Tony Avella, NYC Councilman. Within one day, Avella's Office notified us that the dinner had been cancelled. Kudo's to Tony Avella. National CSJ President, Al DiNapoli, thanked Tony for his participation at the CSJ Luncheon.

In this month's Justice, you will find a letter addressed to our two US Senators concerning the 2010 census and the fact that the Census Bureau is planning to remove the long form of the Ancestry Question from the 2010 census; and will only ask about race and Hispanic origin. The Ancestry Question is the only reliable way to learn about size, education, employment profile and earning power of various ethnic groups including Italian Americans. Researchers rely on the Ancestry Question's data to study population groups and trends. The business world depends on it for marketing and economic expansion. Civil rights agencies use it to monitor discrimination; and politicians need it to respond to the concerns of the ethnic communities they represent. Please take the time to copy this letter and send it to the Senators as soon as possible. This issue is important to Italian Americans.

Dr. Angelo Gismondo, founder of Italian Culture Month and our own Michael Santo, Esq. have been named as honorees at the CSJ Annual Dinner to be held on February 25, 2007. Save the date!

Once again, I will borrow a slogan from the MTA – *If you see or hear something, say something.* We can only fight incidents of bias, bigotry and negative stereotyping, if we know about them.

Remember – *If you are a member of OSIA you are a member of CSJ!*

*Fraternally,*

*Stella Grillo  
CSJ President*