

April 25, 2009

Dear NYS OSIA President Nancy DiFiori Quinn, National and State Officers, Lodge Presidents, Sisters and Brothers:

We extend greetings on behalf of the New York State Commission for Social Justice, and express our appreciation to the Dr. Vincenzo J. Sellaro Lodge # 2319, for their generosity and hospitality today.

We have been very busy since our last Plenary Session, pursuing our expanded goals of fighting bias, bigotry and discrimination against Italians and Italian Americans by sending out many letters addressing negative advertising, stereotyping and other forms of bigotry. We don't always receive responses to our complaints, but we must continue to make our feelings known, whenever a stereotyping situation arises.

We have attended meetings and events, whereby we have been able to distribute our positive image material. We continue to make a constant effort to provide information on the many accomplishments of Italians and Italian Americans. We are presently working on new and innovative positive image material.

Mille Gracie, to our National and State Officers, Lodge Presidents and our sisters and brothers of the Order, for their constant support, both financially and with their presence at our Dinner Dance, held on February 22, 2009 at Russo's On The Bay in Howard Beach, New York.

Your generous donations, during the year and at convention, help us to carry out the work of the CSJ, and enable us to continue to create and disseminate positive image materials.

Remember - if you're a member of OSIA, you're also a member of the CSJ.

Sincerely and Fraternaly,

Stella Grillo
NYS CSJ President

I. Goals of the Commission for Social Justice

Our goals of fighting bias, bigotry and discrimination against Italians and Italian Americans and promoting a positive image of Americans of Italian descent are accomplished through our Complaint Directory, our many programs including the Medal of Honor, the Holocaust Memorial Program, our video-documentary "Italian American Recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor," positive image materials, speaking engagements, and the publication of our CSJ newspaper *Justice*. We underscore the importance of retaining and supporting our present CSJ members as a high priority.

II Italian Language Program

The AP Italian program is important because it allows committed young men and women to earn college credit or advanced standing for their high school work and can help students graduate early from some colleges and universities, saving them or their families thousands of dollars in tuition fees. AP courses are offered in cities and towns across the country, providing students who may never travel overseas exposure to Italy's great language and culture.

Despite the AP Italian program's robust growth, the College Board faced losses it considered unsustainable. Shortly after it announced it would suspend AP Italian in the absence of outside contributions, the Italian Language Foundation was established. Between August and December of 2008, the ILF worked closely with the College Board, which developed a strategy through which streamlined its operations relating to AP Italian. As a result, its requirements to maintain the program were reduced from \$4.5 million to \$1.5 million for the academic year of 2009-2010.

The ILF also created and coordinated Task Forces of Italian language teachers and advocates throughout the United States to increase student participation in AP Italian beginning with the 2009 academic year. They also launched a fundraising campaign to help offset the College Board's losses while student participation in AP Italian, and revenues from the program, increased. During those six months, the ILF raised over \$650,000 in donations and in pledges from individuals, corporations and philanthropic organizations in the United States. The great majority of these commitments however, were contingent upon on a financial partnership with the Republic of Italy. Despite extensive good faith discussions and negotiations, and numerous positive indications, material contributions from the Republic of Italy were not forthcoming. As a result, the AP Italian Language and Culture program will be suspended beginning with the 2009-2010 academic year.

It was disappointing that the Republic of Italy declined the opportunity to invest in AP Italian. The ILF has remained committed to further developing a network of support for Italian language educators throughout the United States, and have remained hopeful that the Republic of Italy will provide financial support and partner with the Italian American community to reinstate the AP Program in Italian in the future.

However, the valiant effort to raise the needed funds was confronted head-on by the unforeseen challenge of the current economic situation, which appears to have restricted organizations', corporations', and governmental abilities to partner with the College Board to save AP Italian. **Accordingly, with great sadness it was confirmed that AP Italian will be suspended following this current, 2008-09 academic year, and will not be offered in the 2009-10 academic year.** While AP Italian will not be offered in 2009-10, if at some future date the funding partnerships needed to support an AP Italian program arise, the Board of Trustees will consider renewing work to develop and offer the AP Italian course and exam.

Update – This notification was received from Margaret Cuomo Meier, upon the completion of this report: **The Italian Language Foundation continues its efforts, in the United States and with officials of the Republic of Italy, to re-establish the Advanced Placement Program in Italian. The College Board has indicated that they would be willing to re-start the process of offering the AP Italian Program, once there is the promise of support from the Republic of Italy.**

The Italian Language Foundation offered a workshop for teachers of Italian in New York City in January, 2009. The topic was, "Using Computer Technology to Enhance Italian Language Education." It was hosted at La Guardia High School, thanks to Anthony della Penna and Mario Costa. The Italian Language Foundation has established a relationship with the San Vigilio Foundation in Trentino, which offers courses in Italy for American students and teachers. Several American teachers of Italian will participate in the study abroad program in Italy this summer.

All contributions to the Italian Language Foundation are in a secure account, and there will be periodic updates.

III College Liaisons

Dr. Salvatore LaLima is currently working on a presentation to send to local colleges regarding our programs, in conjunction with Dr. Salvatore LaGumina. They are also working on obtaining information on textbooks utilized at Suffolk Community College, and Nassau Community College, that depict Columbus in a derogatory manner.

IV NYS CSJ – B’nai B’rith Breakfast

Our 28th Annual NYS CSJ – B’nai B’rith Breakfast of Solidarity, between the Jewish and Italian-American Communities will be held at Verdi’s of Westbury at 9:30 AM – Tickets \$40. Lehman-LaGuardia Awards, will be presented to Rabbi Steven Moss, Chairperson – Suffolk County Human Rights Division and Flaminia Lubin, Film Producer and Director. All are welcome to join with us.

V NYS CSJ 29th Anniversary Dinner-Dance - Sunday, Feb. 22, 2009

At 29th Annual CSJ Dinner-Dance, which was held on Sunday, February 22, 2009, the CSJ honored two committed individuals –Dr. Carlo Sclafani, full time Professor and Chairperson of the Westchester Community College Modern Languages Department, among other achievements and Robert Spiotto, Artistic Director, Community Arts Programs and Executive Producer, Hofstra Entertainment among other accomplishments. Our honorees have distinguished themselves by their contributions to the Italian American Community by promoting a positive image of Italians and Italian Americans at their educational institutions and throughout their community. Many, many thanks to the National and State Officers, Lodge Presidents, members and friends who helped make this event successful.

VI Italian American Legislator’s Conference

The Annual Italian American Legislator’s Conference will be held on **Sunday, June 7, 2009**. Because it is scheduled in conjunction with the closing day of our annual Convention in Albany, members are encouraged to participate in the conference at the Legislators Office Building in Albany, before returning home. The \$35 cost includes a lunch and dinner at the State Room. Senator Diane Savino, President of the Italian American Legislators, is planning a program that will address concerns of Italian Americans. Our members will have the opportunity to meet with their Italian American State Legislators. There is a parking garage located underneath the legislative office building. When exiting off Interstate 787, the ramp will take you right underneath the building - the visitor parking is level P3.

VII Snug Harbor, Staten Island

Snug Harbor Tuscan Gardens in Staten Island has recently been opened to the public. The Garibaldi Museum was given exhibit space in the Exhibition Hall and has asked CSJ to assist in funding and putting together the various exhibits for display. Stella Grillo and Josephine Truglio met with John Dabbene and Robert Necci to evaluate the exhibits and determine what is required to put the projects together.

VIII Congressional Medal of Honor Program

This program will be displayed at Snug Harbor for several months later in the year. John Dabbene and Robert Necci have donated, to the CSJ, several displays to enhance the Medal of Honor Program, that depict various wartime efforts by Italian Americans. These exhibits will be refurbished by the CSJ

We are continuing to promote and distribute our wonderful Medal of Honor documentary video to lodges, other state CSJ's, military groups, and other interested parties throughout the country. We encourage the showing of the 6-minute promo tape and the sale of the video documentary, when displaying the Congressional Medal of Honor Program. The cost of the tape has been reduced to \$5.00 (plus \$2.50 for postage and handling, if mailed).

IX Video Tape Library

Our video-tape library has been categorized and shelved at the Garibaldi Meucci Museum. We have developed a system for the tapes to be loaned to lodges, organizations and individuals. We welcome donations of video-tapes and DVD's appropriate to our collection. The complete listing can be downloaded from our web site, together with rental information, www.nyscsj-osia.org/ We are constantly adding to our collection, and welcome donations and suggestions..

X Complaint Directory Issues:

We have been contacted by members, on various occasions, requesting CSJ intervention on an issue of bias and/or bigotry against Italian –Americans. We try to respond to every issue brought to our attention. It would be most helpful if you provide us with the TV or radio station, date and time of the program, and as much information as possible so that we can properly respond to the issue.

On several occasions, we have received an irate email asking why we haven't handled a complaint. Upon investigation, it was found that the complaint was made to another party and was never related to us. We have also received email asking us to handle an issue that occurred several months ago. By the time we looked into the matter, it was no longer an issue. After much discussion concerning the handling of complaints we developed guidelines for this purpose.

- **Denny's Restaurant Chain** – Just in time to be aired nationally during this year's Superbowl, Denny's developed an advertisement for their "*Serious Breakfast*" The ad depicted three obvious "Mafia persona" planning a mob hit to eliminate "Benny," while a waitress sprayed a whipped cream *smiley face* on their pancakes. We received many emails and telephone calls at this outrage. We joined with the National CSJ in a letter writing campaign to the President and CEO of Denny's, who is Italian, complaining about this advertisement. In our letter we wrote, "*You surely must be aware that Italian Americans, the fifth largest ethnic group in the United States, comprise a large number of patrons at your restaurant chain throughout the United States. What would make your company think that they would welcome this type of advertisement? Why would you choose to denigrate any ethnic group? The ad is neither amusing nor entertaining.*" He responded by saying that he thought it was entertaining. Other Italian American organizations joined with us in this effort. Together with National CSJ, we then developed a Press Release, which was circulated to all State Grand Lodges and to our NY State membership. I am happy to report that the objectionable portion of this ad was removed from the air.
- **Verizon** – An advertisement on national prime time television for Verizon Wireless portrayed an Italian American family, named Coroleo, in a negative and demeaning manner. We received many e-mails and telephone calls complaining that this ad sent a harmful message throughout our country about Italian Americans. The New York CSJ joined with National CSJ and those of other states, in a letter writing campaign, and we received the following e-mail message in reply,

reprinted in pertinent part, “...in response to your communication to Ivan Seidenberg, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Verizon Communications. Thank you for your comments regarding our commercial that depicts an American family at a backyard barbeque. We will stop airing this commercial beginning this weekend.”

- **Curtis Sliwa** – Several weeks ago, Curtis Sliwa embarked on a tirade, during one of his radio programs, which is aired nationally, about the earmarking of the stimulus money that was being disbursed by the federal government. He particularly pointed out that the Italian American Museum received a portion of this money and then went on to make some very derogatory remarks relating the museum to the Mafia. We were contacted by National CSJ and other Italian American Organizations concerning this outrage. Letters were sent to Curtis and ABC News concerning the matter. I also contacted Joseph Scelsa, Director of the Italian American Museum and offered our support in this matter.

Arrangements were made by Dr. Scelsa to meet with Sliwa, representatives of ABC News, community leaders and other Italian American Organizations, at the Museum on March 30th. We met earlier than the prescribed time to discuss the program and strategy to be taken. Dr. Joseph Scelsa commenced by taking Curtis Sliwa and ABC representatives on a brief tour of the Museum, describing the exhibits and talking about the positive contributions of Italians to America. A brief documentary was shown concerning the establishment of the museum. Ronald Mannino, a museum board member, introduced our concerns and issues with Sliwa’s broadcast. Sliwa then addressed the group at length. He commenced by pointing out that his mother is an Italian American. He indicated that the initial theme of his broadcast that night was the stimulus package issue and what groups were earmarked to receive benefits from this package. It was his understanding that monies were to go only to companies to generate jobs and employment. He further indicated that he felt that no museum, other than the Smithsonian, should benefit from stimulus money. He further admitted that he unfortunately got “carried away” during the program and should not have targeted the museum or associated it with organized crime.

Dr. Scelsa provided documentation that the grant they received was accomplished through the efforts of a New York Congressman, prior to any stimulus provisions. Other ethnic organizations were also the recipients of grants through this same Congressman. Discussions were polite and informative. Sliwa agreed to speak about the matter on the air and perhaps invite Dr. Scelsa to a broadcast to discuss positive Italian American contributions. A letter will go out outlining the resolution together with an apology. A copy of this letter is attached.

- **Brown University, Rhode Island** The faculty of the Ivy League university voted to establish a new academic and administrative holiday in October called "Fall Weekend" that coincides with Columbus Day, but that doesn't bear the name of the explorer. Hundreds of Brown students had asked the Providence, R.I. school to stop observing Columbus Day, saying Christopher Columbus's violent treatment of Native Americans he encountered was inconsistent with Brown's values. The change will take effect this fall. However, Brown will remain closed on Columbus Day, in part to avoid inconveniencing staff whose children might have the holiday off. We believe that this decision on the part of these students is the result of the elimination of teaching about the accomplishments of Columbus, and the new teaching concept that Columbus did not discover America, because it was already inhabited and that he was responsible for slavery and other maladies suffered by Native Americans. This matter was addressed by the National CSJ President, and the Grand Lodge in Rhode Island. We offered our support on the issue. What can be done about this situation, which probably will continue throughout the country? We must continue in our efforts to bring the positive image of Columbus back into the textbooks, commencing at the elementary school level.
- **Mob Candy Magazine** - This magazine is rearing its ugly head again. We were advised by Brother Barratta, National CSJ President, that he received a disturbing phone call from a

representative of this magazine, who was extremely desperate to interview him for a feature story about the history of OSIA. He, of course, refused. Barratta is also requesting that, if contacted, no member of OSIA speak with anyone from Mob Candy. NYS CSJ tried to prevent this magazine from being published, to no avail. The publisher of this offensive magazine claims to be a *proud Italian American*.

XI Positive Image

On May 1, 2009, CSJ President will speak about the Commission for Social Justice at the Westbury Union Free School District Elementary School. Bookmarks and other material will be distributed to the children.

XVI Calendar of Events – New York State CSJ

September, 2009 (date to be announced) A Day at the Races, Belmont Raceway - More information will be provided

Teacher's Conference, September 2009 (date to be announced) - 9:30 AM at Hofstra University - More information will be provided.