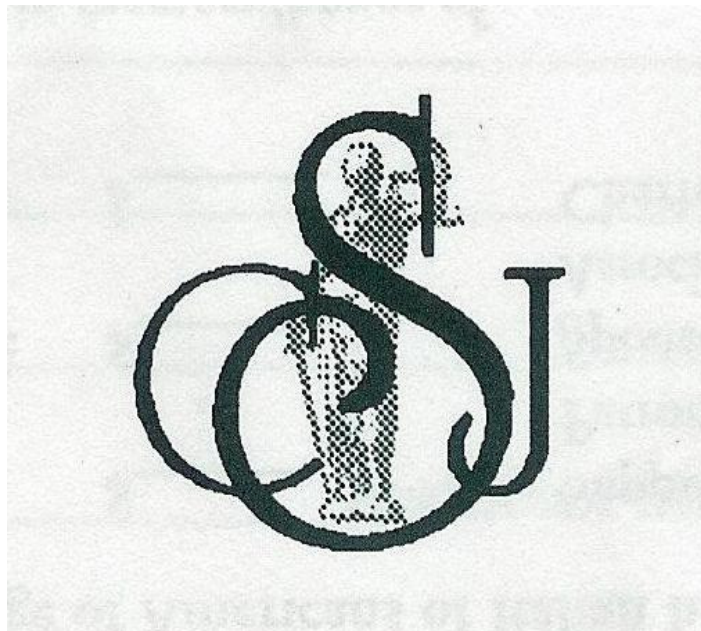


Commission for Social Justice

Order Sons of Italy in America

**Plenary Session Report
October 29, 2011**

**Geneva Lodge #2201
31 Prospect Avenue
Geneva NY 14456**



Enrico J. Annichiarico, Chairman
NYS Commission for Social Justice

I Mission of the Commission for Social Justice

The purpose of the Commission for Social Justice (CSJ) is to insure equal concern, respect, treatment, and opportunity for all Italians, Italian Americans and those of other ethnic origins by appropriate and lawful purposes. It strives to advance understanding among all people through educational endeavors and makes every effort to preserve and translate into greater effectiveness, the principles of liberty, equality and justice,

To actualize its mission, the CSJ works to aid, assist, foster, promote and advance good will and proper understanding among Americans, preserve and translate into greater effectiveness, the ideals of American Democracy, eliminate bias, bigotry and prejudice and counteract un-American and anti-democratic activities through broad educational programs.

The goals of the CSJ are effectuated through its Complaint Directory and by various proactive programs and projects to include: the Medal of Honor Program, the film documentary, "Italian American Recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor", the Holocaust Memorial Program, Italian language and culture initiatives, positive image materials, speaking engagements, and the publication of our newspaper, *Justice*. Of course, the retention and support of our CSJ members is always a priority.

II Italian Language Program – Good News!

Recently, CSJ has made arrangements to provide, The Aurora Italian Language and Culture Scholarship Program for Children to filial lodges of NYS OSIA at an affordable cost. Aurora was created by the Italic Institute of America. It is a well written and comprehensive program that incorporates Italian culture into its lesson plans.

The current state of the economy has significantly impacted foreign language programs across the State. We have heard from concerned parents and teachers from a number of school districts who indicated that Italian classes in their schools are either in danger of being cut or have been terminated.

This problem underscores the need to promote Italian language after school programs for students at the 5th/6th level. After school programs help to create and maintain interest in learning Italian among young people in school districts that have cut the program or have never taught Italian. The programs also serve to promote and support Italian language study in districts that have Italian language programs by developing a reserve of students ready to enroll in Italian classes when they enter Middle School.

It is critical that the CSJ focus on the implementation of after school programs as part of its efforts to promote Italian language and culture throughout NY State. An article in the summer issue of *The Officers Log*, a publication of the Italic Institute of America, lends support to this priority (July, 2011, No. 41).

The Institute conducted follow up research on the Italian AP Program that was restored by the financial support of the Italian Government and major Italian American Organizations, including OSIA. The Institute contacted the College Board to determine the terms of the agreement to restore the AP Program at the cost of the three million dollars paid by Italy and the Italian American organizations. It learned that the College Board agreed to fix the number of students needed to apply for the AP tests at 2,300 for an indefinite period. The Institute added that this is the highest number of students that Italian language programs had attracted to take the AP test in the prior three years.

Considering that out of the 750+ school districts in New York State, only about 160 have Italian language programs, it would be quite a leap to guarantee 2,300 AP caliber candidates from that relatively small student population. Actually, the College Board originally demanded a minimum of 5,000 – 10,000 students. Reaching even the minimum of 5,000 eligible students would be nearly impossible.

The Institute submits that, even though the bar is now set at 2,300 students needed to take the AP exam, it still will be a challenge to maintain that number given the scarcity of after school programs for elementary school and middle school children. It notes that the problem is exacerbated by the fact that Italian AP tests were suspended for two years. As a result, many potential students avoided taking Italian. The institute rightfully concludes that “if the wolf comes to the door again,” it would be difficult even to meet the AP requirement of 2,300 students.

Therefore, now is the time to move forward with after school initiatives. We must add substance to the assiduous efforts and financial commitments made by Italy, OSIA and other major Italian Americans to retain the AP program in New York State.

Without question, the Aurora Italian Language and Culture Scholarship Program for Children fits the needs of filial lodges that are interested in getting an Italian language program in their local school districts or in supporting an existing school program. For a reasonable cost, a lodge can provide twelve weeks of quality Italian language and culture education to twenty 5th/6th grade elementary school students. Student and teacher materials, games and prizes are included.

A notable feature of the Aurora language and culture course is the culmination ceremony. Parents, grandparents, friends and community leaders are invited to congratulate the students and attend the festive celebration that follows the ceremony. This is also an opportunity for the host lodge to set up a membership table to attract prospective members. This has been a successful membership approach for lodges that have invested in the Aurora program. Contact the CSJ for further details.

The CSJ continues to support Italian programs at all grade levels. It provides teachers with educational and positive image materials to enhance their classroom instruction and complement the atmosphere of “Italianita” that typically enriches their classrooms. This support also will be provided to lodges that implement after school programs.

III CSJ –AATI Breakfast

The annual breakfast meeting between the CSJ and the American Association of Teachers of Italian (AATI) was first held in 1997 under the leadership of then CSJ Chairman John Dabbene. Santina Haemmerle organized the event. It took place at the Hofstra University Campus in Uniondale where it is still held today.

The purpose of the event is to meet with teachers of Italian and Social Studies to promote and discuss CSJ programs, distribute positive image materials, and to dialogue with AATI members regarding their concerns about the teaching of Italian on Long Island. The invitation list has been expanded to include History teachers and Library Media Specialists.

The CSJ mission is to advance understanding among all people through educational endeavors. Therefore, a priority in our association with AATI is to promote Italian language education and foster understanding and appreciation of Italian heritage and the contributions of Italians and Italian Americans to American Society.

As mentioned, the CSJ supports the educators by providing them with educational and positive image materials to enhance their instruction and classroom atmosphere. In addition, it offers guidelines and resources to help filial lodges and other interested parties get Italian in their local schools, assists lodges in implementing after school programs for elementary school students, and provides guest speakers to present positive image and historical programs that highlight the global contributions of Italians and Italian Americans.

The CSJ also invites educators to the CSJ-AATI breakfast as guest speakers to share lesson plans, ideas and methodologies with the attending teachers. Over the years, dozens of master teacher presenters have helped to inspire young teachers and impart to them valuable teaching techniques that they brought back to their classrooms.

This year's breakfast at Hofstra was held on September 18th. The theme of the meeting was *Motivating and Teaching Students of Italian through Music*. The attendance was exceptional and the program was well received. NYS State President Thom Lupo, National President, Joseph DiTrapani and National CSJ President, Santina Haemmerle, were present and offered their supportive remarks.

Thank you to Camille Annichiarico, who chaired the event, and members of the CSJ Executive Committee. They included: Stella Grillo, Marge and Sal Moschella, Anthony Corsello, Jean Gagliardo, Lee Cerullo and volunteer, Marie Cerullo.

IV Positive Image

The CSJ is now updating its positive image materials and developing new ideas to portray Italians and Italian Americans in their very best light. Jean Gagliardo has redesigned and rewritten some of our positive image items to make them visually appealing and intelligible to elementary school children. Ideas for new programs and materials are being explored.

CSJ distributed some of its new positive image materials to CSJ representatives from many states at the OSIA National Convention in August. It also was interesting to share information and ideas with our counterparts across the country. It was apparent that the NYS CSJ is highly regarded nationally for its positive image initiatives and leadership in the fight against bias, bigotry, defamation and negative stereotyping against Italian Americans.

On October 1st, an array of CSJ positive image materials including a sample exhibit of the Italian American Recipients of Medal of Honor were displayed at the kick-off breakfast at Verdi's Restaurant in Westbury NY to celebrate Italian Heritage Month. The new Italian Explorer bookmarks and Christopher Columbus poster were also featured.

CSJ is now preparing a new poster depicting the recipients of the NYS Literary Award in Memory of Pietro Di Donato and John Fante that is presented at the NYS Grand Lodge Convention. Leo Cimini is in charge of the project.

The CSJ distributes educational and positive image materials to educators, filial lodges, OSIA members and other interested persons throughout the country. We encourage Lodges to distribute these materials to their local libraries, schools and at community events.

V Medal of Honor Program

The CSJ's Medal of Honor Program continues to be a popular exhibit among various audiences. Of course, it is especially well received by various military groups, at Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies and at other public events to honor our military and veterans. CSJ distributes the Medal of Honor video documentary to lodges, State CSJ's, military groups, and other interested parties around the country.

As Veterans' Day approaches, lodges are encouraged to display this program in their communities. Also, it is suggested that lodges show the Medal of Honor 6-minute promo videotape in conjunction with this exhibit. CSJ will be happy to provide information on how to set up and present the program to help insure that it is professionally and reverently displayed to honor our Italian American war heroes.

CSJ is now updating its publication, *Italian- American Recipients of the Medal of Honor*, which accompanies the exhibit. The booklet and the exhibit now include the latest recipients: Hector A. Cafferata, Jared C. Monte, and Salvatore A. Giunta. All districts that have a display should have these renderings. If not, please contact the CSJ.

The Medal of Honor exhibit is available to all districts. If a district does not have a display, the CSJ will provide one for use by local filial lodges through the CSJ district chairperson. For information, contact the CSJ.

VI Holocaust Memorial Program

Vincent Marmorale, Chairman of the Holocaust Memorial Committee, has been busy speaking before various groups and organizations. He is working with Elizabeth Bettina, author of It Happened in Italy, to gather further documentation on how the Italian people saved thousands of Jews from Nazi internment during World War II.

Vincent and Elizabeth have completed a short pilot of a film documentary on their research, which was shown at the Queensborough College Holocaust Memorial Center on April 3, 2011. They are currently in the process of seeking additional sponsors to support this project.

On October, 23rd, the CSJ in cooperation with the Nassau County Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center in Glen Cove, N.Y., presented a program to celebrate the heroic story of how Italy saved Jewish refugees during the holocaust. It was a dramatic presentation entitled, *It Happened in Italy: A Tale of Camaraderie and Valor*. It was performed by members of the CSJ Executive Committee, Elizabeth Bettina and Hannah Skopicki, a student from Roslyn High School. The CSJ players included: Vincent Marmorale, Enrico and Camille Annichiarico and Marjorie and Sal Moschella.

Dr. Marcia Posner, Librarian and Research Specialist at the Museum, wrote the script in collaboration with Vincent and Bettina. The program included remarkable and profound testimonies by holocaust survivors who were given refuge and safe by Italians. Their stories of courage and survival, amidst the atmosphere of danger and uncertainty of that dark period, evoked an array of emotions among the very appreciative audience that filled the room to capacity.

The program content and format received many compliments from the ethnically diverse audience. Without question, it is worthy of consideration to become one of the CSJ's positive image projects. With minor adaptations, it would be suitable for presentation in schools and before a wide variety of adult audiences. The CSJ plans to move forward with this initiative.

VII CSJ Districts

The CSJ has been in contact with the Chairpersons in all eight NYS Districts. We are impressed with the programs and positive image activities that take place throughout the State. We also have sent letters to all Lodge Presidents requesting the name and contact information of their CSJ liaisons and asking that they appoint a CSJ Liaison if they have not already done so. We appreciate the response that we have received.

District I – Enrico Annichiarico, State CSJ Chair, continues to serve as the District I CSJ Chair until a replacement is appointed. CSJ liaisons from Districts I, II and III assisted with preparations for the CSJ-AATI Breakfast meeting on September 18, 2011 at Hofstra University. The program was a huge success.

District II – The District presented a special recognition award to volunteers, Mary Abby and Jean Gagliardo, for their dedication and tireless efforts on behalf of District II CSJ. District Chair Lee Cerullo ran an active double tent CJ booth at the John Michael Marino Lodge #1389 Annual Italian Feast. He set up various displays and handed out CSJ Brochures and positive image materials to hundreds of visitors.

District III – Anthony Corsello, the new District III Chair, has received good participation from the district lodges. He had a large attendance at his September meeting at which several possible district project ideas were discussed.

District IV – No report as of this printing.

District V – John Bosso reports that the Rockland Lodge #2176 held its Annual Festa D'Italia that drew an attendance of about 30,000, including NYS State OSIA President, Thom Lupo and First Lady Barbara. John and his CSJ team set up a CSJ table and handed out CSJ brochures and positive image materials to many visitors. John indicated that people were pleasantly surprised and impressed with CSJ's efforts and achievements on behalf of Italian Americans. Thank you to John and his team for getting out CSJ's message to the Italian American community.

District VI – Joseph De Carlo highlighted the Festival of Nations, which is celebrating its 40th Anniversary on October 30th at the Empire Plaza in Albany. Joe added that Sabarina Vignolesi, daughter of Marie Di Loreto and granddaughter of Dolores Scalisi, both members of the Gabrielle D'Anunzio Lodge #321, will be representing Italy in the Festival. The Festival of Nations was founded in 1972. Its purpose is to bring together people of various ethnic groups to share their ethnic pride and work together in the spirit of community solidarity. It encourages the participation of young people to celebrate their heritage with their families and become acquainted with people of other cultures. Congratulations to Sabrina and her family.

District VII – Carmine Federico reported that Columbus Day dinner dances and celebrations and Italian festivals were held by filial lodges in Binghamton, Endicott, Syracuse, and Utica. He added that Josephine's "Italian Choraliers" were honored to sing the Italian and American National Anthems at a wreath laying ceremony at the Columbus Monument in Syracuse on October 22nd.

District VIII – Jennifer Rube' reported that the Vincent Lombardi Lodge #2270 Festa Italiana in Rochester, NY was a great success. She was pleased to announce that she will be teaching Beginners Italian Genealogy and Family Research at the Italian American Community Center (IACC) in Rochester. She added that the IACC is also providing Italian classes for adults and children. Jennifer congratulated the Geneva Lodge #2397 and the Geneva Italian American Ladies Lodge #2397A on the success of their Italian Festival. Well done District VIII!

Regrettably, John Bosso had to resign from his position as District V CSJ Chairman due to lodge commitments, business and family obligations and involvement with other organizations. We thank John for giving the position his best effort and we know that he will continue to serve the Rockland Lodge # 2176 and support the CSJ to the best of his ability.

Mille Grazie to all OSIA filial Lodges, CSJ District Chairs and CSJ Lodge Liaisons for promoting our proud Heritage. Keep up the good work.

VIII Complaint Directory

This section contains one of the most important aspects of our work – writing letters to those who defame Italians and Italian Americans. It is an ongoing challenge to monitor the various forms of the media for content that is offensive to Italian Americans. The most recent incidents are the following:

- **NBC** announced that its season premiere of *Law and Order SVU* will feature Franco Nero as an Italian dignitary accused of rape, evoking the case of Dominique Straus-Kahn, the French head of the International Monetary Fund, who was accused of sexually assaulting a maid in a Midtown Manhattan hotel. A letter was sent to NBC Headquarters complaining about the network's choice to make an Italian the offender of such a vile act of violence that closely parallels the events of the Strauss-Kahn case, which received national attention. NBC did not respond and the program was aired.
- **Fox Five News** aired an episode in which commentators discussed Abercrombie and Fitch's offer to pay Mike "The Situation" Sorrentino from the Jersey Shore series not to wear their sport clothing line. During the discussion, Bob Beckel, one of the news panelists said, "Why would Abercrombie and Fitch want a bunch of grease balls wearing their clothes?" CSJ sent a scathing letter of complaint to the Fox Network. Fox did not respond but we believe that the network and Mr. Beckel got the message.
- **Via CSJ Website**, a complaint was submitted about a comment made by WPIX News Reporter, Larry Mendt on October 12, 2011. During his report about Mitt Romney and the support that he has received from New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, Mr. Mendt likened Governor Christie to Tony Soprano. CSJ sent a letter WPIX News 11 objecting to Mendt's inappropriate reference.

The CSJ's fight against offensive media programming is aided by the vigilance of OSIA members who contact us when they see or hear something defamatory and bring it to our attention. We appreciate this cooperation and we try to respond as promptly as possible to the information that we receive.

The process is made easier when we have sufficient details on the matter. It is therefore important that we are provided with information such as the name of the TV program and the date and time of the broadcast, the name and issue of the newspaper or magazine and any other details that can help us respond quickly and appropriately to the issue.

IX CSJ College Liaisons – Salvatore La Lima and Dr. Salvatore La Gumina

Sal La Lima is a Past President of Suffolk Community College. Earlier this year, he sent letters to Long Island Colleges and Universities reminding them that October is Italian Heritage Month and offering CSJ's participation and support.

Sal assisted in promoting the Suffolk Community College Italian Heritage Month programs that were held at its Selden Campus. The College offered a series of lectures on historical, religious and artistic themes that relate to Italy's development. They included: The Mediterranean of the Three Cultures: Christians, Muslims and Jews between History and Myth; *Commedia dell' Arte*: An unusual lecture, and Italy and its Unification in 1861.

Dr. Sal La Gumina, Director of Nassau C.C. Center for Italian Studies, presented a program entitled, *Italianita' in America*. The featured topics were: Italy's Transition and Challenges from Ancient Culture to New Country, Italy after Unification, Italian Americans Today: A Sociological-demographic Snapshot and Italian Influences in American Food, Fashion, Film and Automobile Design.

We thank our two esteemed CSJ College Liaisons for their efforts in promoting our rich Italian heritage. In the near future, they will play a prominent role in CSJ's plans to develop communication with colleges and universities throughout NY State. We hope to create an informational web link with institutions that offer lectures and symposiums on topics of interest to Italian-Americans that are open to the community.

Through this initiative, CSJ also plans to establish dialogue with the Italian clubs at these institutions. The interaction with the student members will afford CSJ the opportunity to introduce young people to OSIA and to create an exchange of ideas for future cooperative endeavors.

X Public Relations

CSJ is working to develop publicity and public relations ideas to promote its positive image programs and activities. A concerted effort is underway to develop a cooperative publicity network with all the Districts. Also, some possibilities for publicity in major newspapers are being pursued.

To complement CSJ's efforts in this matter, we urge lodges to place articles about their activities and events in their local newspapers on a regular basis. This practice is a good tool to spotlight the lodge's contributions to the community and the benefits that it offers to its members.

It is also a good idea for lodges to occasionally select an article of interest from the Golden Lion or an important press release from the Grand Lodge or CSJ Justice and submit it for local release. This gives the community a broader understanding and appreciation of the work of OSIA.

Imagine the vast publicity network that could be created and shared if every filial lodge in New York State had an active rapport with its local newspaper. We know that many lodges regularly prepare articles for press release, but there is still plenty of room for expansion. Interested lodges are encouraged to contact the CSJ for publicity ideas and suggestions.

XI CSJ Website

The CSJ website can be accessed at www.nyscsj.org. CSJ Webmaster, Terry Tanzer, installed a complaint form that can be filled out on-line with instructions on how to forward it for review. Thus far, the program has proven to be a convenient, practical and efficient method for web users to communicate with the CSJ. Terry also has been helpful in responding to complaints and inquiries received through the website.

As indicated earlier in this report, we are considering several other program possibilities such as creating web links to colleges and universities throughout NY State that offer courses in Italian language and Italian American Studies. These links would serve to inform OSIA members throughout NY State of symposiums and lectures on topics of interest to Italian Americans held at these institutions that are open to the public.

We thank Terry for his creative ideas and technical assistance to help the CSJ reach out to all sectors of the community.

XII CSJ Film Library

The CSJ film library is still being updated. We are reviewing new material on DVD and reformatting films that are on videotape. Hopefully, CSJ will be lending out films again in the very near future.

XIII CSJ Advisory Board – New Additions

The New York State Commission for Social Justice welcomes the following new members to our Board of Advisors:

- Professor Carlo Sclafani, Director of the Center for Italian Studies,
Westchester Community College
- Dr. Lois Mignone, Director of Foreign Languages and ESL Program,
Suffolk Community College
- Dr. Joseph Tursi, Professor Emeritus, Stony Brook University
- Richard Vetere, Author, Playwright and Professor of Media Studies, Queens College.

NYS Commission for Social Justice Calendar of Events

February 19, 2012 – CSJ Annual Dinner Dance at Russo’s on the Bay in Howard Beach honoring CSJ Immediate Past President, Stella Grillo and Dr. Vito DiSimone, Professor of Italian, Past Director of the Center for Italian Studies at Brooklyn College and Founder and Past President of the Association of Italian American Educators. More information will follow.

NYS COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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