

The Founders' Log

No. 14

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March 2001

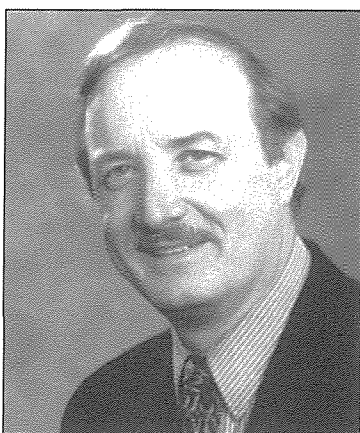
Founders of the Italic Studies Institute, 1987

Stefano Gristina

John Mancini

Carl Pescosolido

Dear Member:



Another *Aurora* season is behind us and more youngsters have discovered Italy. The statistics are impressive: 12 locations, 15 classes, 400 students, 32 teachers and assistants, 6 center directors, 20 school districts, 360 classroom hours, and a \$65,000 budget.

It is one thing to speak of the *Aurora* Program, it is quite another to live it as our staff of forty instructors and support staff does. There is the staff training, the production of lesson books, the recruitment of students, the registration process, the inventory of teaching kits and support services into seven counties, the weekly attendance sheets, the payrolls, the calls to parents, the food and snack purchases, and the graduation ceremonies. We do all of this to insure that children and parents see the best side of the Italian heritage. From our *Aurora* Director, Tony DeNonno, on down, we present a program that has won praises from every school district we reach. As members and donors to the Institute, you can take pride in what is accomplished each year on such a meager budget. Other organizations are only too happy to give away modest scholarships to tens of individuals and not be responsible for their education. We, however, give *Aurora* scholarships to hundreds of students and know exactly what they are being taught. That is the ISI difference. That is why you have joined us in this work. As member Joey Fay of the Bronx writes, "The *Aurora* Program is where everyone should put their efforts and dollars." (Joey donated \$1,000.)

ISI elections were held in February and a new slate of officers was elected. These are not hotly contested positions but there is no pecking order of succession like in other organizations. ISI is truly an open democracy. Your Plenary Council membership is your ticket to participate. Among the choices on the ballot this year is a referendum for a name change to The Italic Institute of America. For those of you who cannot vote, let us know how you feel about it.

I mentioned in the last *Log* that co-founder **Carl Pescosolido** was about to announce a major grant to the Institute. Well, he has done so. Peski, as he is known to

(Continued)



Carl Pescosolido

those close to him, has given a six-figure donation that will be used to establish our development section. His generosity coincides with his 90th birthday and the publication of his biography *Lucky Peski*. Luck, of course, had something to do with his financial success, but it mostly came from hard work and a keen mind for business. Carl made his mark in the petroleum business and capped his career with the selling of his business to Getty Oil. However, Carl's overriding passion is getting the message out about the incomparable Italian heritage. To that end, he has endowed a chair in Roman Civilization at Harvard (his *alma mater*) and published the book *The Proud Italians*, which we carry in our catalogue. *Aurora* is of vital concern to him and he has aptly demonstrated his commitment to it.

Finally, we the Founders pledge to you our commitment to make the Institute the standard bearer of the Italian heritage. We shall accomplish this with our existing programs and with daring new initiatives. More on these in future notices.

May the New Year bring you and your family good health and happiness.

John Mancini, Chairman

AN AURORA PARENT'S LETTER

"I just wanted to write a brief note to thank Signora Maietta and Signorina Anteri for the wonderful experience they gave our daughter, Natalie. This class was extremely well organized and fun for the children. To think that they would willingly give up an entire Saturday morning to sit in a classroom speaks volumes about the high quality of the class. Natalie eagerly anticipated going every week and was very disappointed the one week she was sick and couldn't attend. While Natalie took a language survey class in Middle School which included some Italian, she learned far more in the Saturday Aurora class. Mille Grazie!"

Suzanne Romano, West Hempstead, NY

ELECTION RESULTS

Officers for the next two years, commencing March 2, 2001 are:

Vincent Pizzulli.....President

Thomas Lacorazza..... Vice President

Rosario Iaconis.....Treasurer

Alfred Cardone.....Financial Secretary

John Mancini.....Secretary of Programs

A majority of voters favored a name change from the Italic Studies Institute to **The Italic Institute of America**. If ratified by the Governors, this will be our 3rd name change. Originally, we were known as the Society for Italic Studies.

MEDIA MOVES

The Institute has been pro-active, as usual, in tackling *The Sopranos* fever. We sent a press release to all periodicals, cable, and broadcast entertainment departments advising them that "Italian American Children [Are] At Risk" because of the incessant marketing and showing of *The Sopranos*. A copy of the release is attached. It costs about \$600 to get a message out to the national media with the hope of perhaps one response. Our Chicago rep, Bill DalCerro, has put together an impressive video package that includes his 1,200 movie reviews that he sends out to special media reporters. He was able to catch the attention of *The Hollywood Daily Reporter* (copy attached).

We are waging the good fight because it is right. Can you imagine that immigrants from India, China, Africa, Russia and every other corner of the world now see Italian Americans represented in movies and television as America's only criminal culture? After 500 years of sweat and blood in this country, is this what we do to ourselves? Can we ever forgive these filmmakers, producers and actors who prostitute our image every day so they can "eat"?

WEBSITE UPDATE

If you haven't visited our website lately, try it soon. We have added some links to Italian news, information, and tourist sources. You can also learn more about the Institute and look up past *Italic Way* articles. Our website's address is www.Italic.org.

GIFTS OF STOCK OR A LIVING TRUST

There are many ways to support our Institute. Have you considered a donation of stock? Transfer your stock certificates to ISI and you may deduct the full market value (date of transfer) and avoid paying any capital gains tax.

OR

Deposit your money in a Living Trust that pays you monthly and makes the Institute your beneficiary. You can enjoy the income and receive an immediate tax deduction for that year. Any remaining assets will be passed on the Institute to further the cause of your Italian heritage.

For further information, contact our General Counsel, George Ricci, Esq., at 516-248-2824.

MAGAZINE IN PROGRESS

Believe it or not, you can expect another issue of *The Italic Way* (issue XXXI -- we are catching up to the Super Bowl!) in the coming weeks. The focus article is entitled "Not Your Grandfather's Italy." As you can guess, it will update you on the ancestral homeland. We regret that we have had to decrease the number of issues published per year, but our small staff is stretched to the limit with the expansion of the *Aurora* Program and our anti-defamation activities. And as always, money is a problem. If you would like to advertise in the magazine, call the ISI office at 516-488-7400. And of course, any donations designated specifically for *The Italic Way* would be greatly appreciated.

YEAR 2001 NATIONAL APPEAL

We have kicked off our Year 2001 National Appeal, and we would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their generosity. We regret if we have inadvertently omitted anyone -- please inform us of any omissions.

Special Friend of the Institute - Major Contributor

Carl A. Pescosolido, Sr.

Guardians of the Italian Heritage - \$1,000 +

Joseph E. Fay (\$1,000)

Thomas Lacorazza (\$1,000)

Patrons of Italian Heritage - \$250 +

The Stauber Family Foundation (\$250)

Sustainers of the Institute - \$100 +

Long Island Society of Italian Americans (\$200)

Charles Sclafani (\$100)

John & Rosemary Villanella (\$150)

A.P. Zechella (\$100)

Supporters of the Institute - \$50 +

Charles J. Cerutti (\$50)

Dr. & Mrs. Santo Chiarello (\$50)

Jacqueline Hines (\$50)

Cesidio Tallini (\$50)

Dr. & Mrs. Harry A. Winters (\$50)

YES, I want to demonstrate my support of the Institute's mission. Please use my tax-deductible donation as follows:

Amount \$ _____

Aurora Youth Scholarships

The Italic Way Magazine

Concert Band

Anti-Defamation (Project Italia)

Office Technology

All of the Above

Make your check payable to **Italic Studies Institute**, P.O. Box 818, Floral Park, NY 11001

Name _____

Address _____

ITALIC STUDIES INSTITUTE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 5 March 2001

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ITALIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN AT RISK

“The commercial media, including HBO’s *The Sopranos*, now has full control of our Italian heritage.” asserts the Chairman John Mancini of the Italic Studies Institute, a New York-based educational nonprofit. “We no longer have the ability to protect our children from the pernicious propaganda that distorts our 500-year legacy in America.”

“It is impossible to gauge the economic consequences of these images to Italian American adults but as a teacher, I have seen the direct effects of this negative stereotyping.” declares Bill Dal Cerro, the Institute’s Chicago media officer. “My students, both Italian and non-Italian, mimic the speech patterns and crude mannerisms of the fictional characters on *The Sopranos*. These are the dominant images that the American public is given of a diverse community of 20 million citizens. There was certainly more balance in the 1950’s and 1960’s, as many can recall. Unbalanced propaganda absolutely affects our youngsters’ self-esteem as well as the perception of them by others, Italian surnames make them easy marks – just ask some political candidates who have run the media gauntlet.”

“We realize that the media holds all the cards,” continued Mancini, “but we intend to get to the heart of our concerns – how demonizing media affects America’s youth.” The Institute is commissioning a sociological study to measure the propaganda effects on pre-teens and teens, the first of its kind for the Italian American community.

The much ballyhooed third season of the HBO series *The Sopranos*, with its seductive blend of Italian American culture and degenerate gangsters, sends the message that average Italian Americans, even their children, are not really what they seem. It is the oldest form of propaganda that demonizes a minority using repeated visual images that linger long after in the minds of viewers. “This series rates with *Birth of Nation* and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in inculcating a compelling negative image of a people.” Says Rosario Iaconis, the Institute’s Director of *The Italic Way Magazine*.

The recent aggressive advertising and promotion behind the series through provocative posters, broadcast television ads, and publicity stunts have bombarded even non-HBO subscribers, including children, with a menacing image of Italian Americans as murderers and thieves. “Those who claim that the Italian-ness of the characters is no reflection on the Italian American culture or community would probably also deny the power of Madison Avenue to sell fantasies,” says Mancini, “When the show held an audition for new characters recently, the only requirement was to ‘look Italian’. It is time to end this charade.”

ITALIC STUDIES INSTITUTE
PRESS RELEASE – 5 March 2001

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The Sopranos is the logical culmination of over 30 years of unbalanced film and television portrayals of Italian Americans as gangsters and buffoons. Led, in part, by misguided Italian American filmmakers and actors, these works have given America an ethnic scapegoat onto which all the woes of society can be cast. It has influenced newspapers and even police authorities to focus on Italian American criminals rather than the more lucrative and heinous crimes of other ethnic groups. Italian American racists, criminals, dummies, and clowns have become easy stock characters for lazy scriptwriters.

The Institute's Report on U.S. Films since 1928 has revealed that of 1,200 feature films 69% have been unquestionably negative to the Italian American image. Of these, fully 58% bear the genetic markings of *The Godfather I* produced in 1972. Of the 487 films which feature Italian Americans as gangsters 88% are fictionized stereotypes. (a copy of the report is available upon request.)

“Replace the Italian-ness of *The Sopranos* with any other ethnicity, fleshed out with their own stereotypes and cultural traits, and you will easily see how unacceptable such propaganda is.” Says Iaconis. “Why should our children bear the burden? Either let every ethnic and social group join us in defamation or allow us the right of an “American” standard. Hiding propaganda behind the guise of art or free expression is hypocrisy at its best, especially if FCC or local cable licensing requires a ‘benefit’ to the public.”

The Italic Studies Institute was founded in 1987 and publishes a national magazine called *The Italic Way*. The Institute also produces educational videos and conducts an Italian language program known as *Aurora*, which is offered free to 5th & 6th graders in the Metro New York area at 15 locations. Preliminary sampling has revealed that some 10 year olds view *The Sopranos* with their parents and are influenced by the show.

For information and requests: 516.488.7400, fax 516.488.4889. email:
ItalicOne@aol.com website: italic.org

H'wood beats up on Italo Americans, study claims

By David Robb

When mob boss Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini) returns to TV on Sunday for the third season of HBO's "The Sopranos," he will be carrying on a long Hollywood tradition: the Italian American as gangster.



Gandolfini

A new five-year study conducted by the Italic Studies Institute maintains that this has been the predominant image of Italian Americans in films for more than 70 years.

The institute, based in Floral

Park, N.Y., found that 40% of the 1,220 films produced in the United States since 1928 that featured Italian American themes depicted Italian Americans as gangsters.

"Italian stereotypes have become ingrained in the American psyche," said Bill Dal Cerro, authored the study for the institute. "We've got this albatross around our necks, and the media keeps pounding away at it."

The report found that of the 487 films in which Italian Americans have been portrayed as gangsters, only 58 of those films were based on real-life characters like Al Capone ("The Untouchables") and Frank

See **ITALIANS** on page 34

Italians

Continued from page 4—

Costello ("Tales of Manhattan"). The other 429 gangster films were based on fictional mobsters like Vito Corleone in "The Godfather."

Dal Cerro said: "Nine out of 10 gangsters in the movies are fake. ... They need a villain, so bring in the Italian."

The report found that other film portrayals of Italian Americans are often negative, even when they're not being depicted as gangsters.

"Results of the research reveal a consistently negative attitude toward Italian Americans and Ital-

ian culture in general (69%," the report said. "Images of Italians as violent criminals predominate (40%), followed by portrayals of boors, buffoons, bigots and bimbos (29%), as compared to images of Italians as positive, heroic or complex roles (31%)."

According to the report: "The figures clearly indicate an entrenched, institutionalized bias against Americans of Italian descent in the entertainment industry. The diversity of the Italian American experience has been obscured through an obsession with negative, one-dimensional stereotypes, equating Italian culture with criminality." □

THE NEW YORK TIMES EDITORIALS/LETTERS TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 2001

'Sopranos' Stereotypes

To the Editor:

Re "The Roots of 'Sopranos' Grew From Cagney Film" (TV Notes, Feb. 28):

David Chase, creator of "The Sopranos," wrote and directed episodes of "Northern Exposure," a series about a Jewish doctor in Alaska, and "I'll Fly Away," about a noble black housekeeper in the segregated South. Yet when it came to writing about his own heritage, Mr. Chase (whose family name was De Cesare) presents us with Tony Soprano, a murderous, inarticulate, foul-mouthed mob boss.

Apparently, he, too, has fallen under the spell of the entertainment industry's decades-long stereotyping of Italian-Americans as goons or buffoons. A report last year from the *Italic Studies Institute revealed that of the 1,078 movies about Italians or Italian-Americans made in the United States between 1928 and 2000, 73 percent portray us in a negative light.

FRANK J. GUARINI

Jersey City, Feb. 28, 2001

The writer is chairman of the National Italian American Foundation.

NEWS & FEATURES**As 'Sopranos' Debuts,
Italian Americans Worry About Image**

By LINDA WALLACE
©2001 DiversityInc.com
March 2, 2001

Send this to a friend

As HBO debuts the season premiere of "The Sopranos," Italian-American groups are asking media executives to try a little reality TV programming – at least where their image is concerned.

"The Sopranos" is a series depicting the drama of a modern-day Mafia family living in New Jersey. But for many Italian Americans, the show is anything but true to life.

"Our research clearly proves that programs like "The Sopranos," which present Italian Americans as undereducated people who are either criminals or in blue-collar jobs, bear no resemblance to the average Italian American, who is a law-abiding citizen working in a white-collar position," said Frank J. Guarini, chairman of the National Italian American Foundation.



James Gandolfini stars as Tony Soprano in the critically acclaimed HBO series "The Sopranos."
(AP Photo/HBO)

The foundation, an advocacy group for an estimated 20 million Americans of Italian descent, said it researched Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) files and found that Italian Americans have constituted only 5.6 percent of the 458 fugitives on the FBI's Most Wanted List over the past 50 years. Italian Americans account for approximately 7 percent of the U.S. population.

Meanwhile, the Italic Studies Institute based in Floral Park, N.Y., said Italian gang members have never numbered more than 5,000, which is fewer than 0.03% of the overall Italian-American community.

John Mancini, chairman of the Italic institute, said movies have wrapped Italian culture – which is viewed as romantic – around crime to sell more tickets or draw in more viewers. But he feels Italian Americans have paid an unacceptable price.

"All media in its own way is a forum for propaganda and image making," said Mancini, who said his group has 1,200 members nationwide. "That should be clear to everyone. Everything conveys a message subliminal or outright. We feel these messages have an effect on people – what we call a lingering image . . . What they have done, they have imbued all the characters with Italian-American culture. You don't see that with other gangsters. They do it because that is what sells. You just don't see movies about Chinese gangsters."

The Italic Studies Institute recently completed a five-year study (1996-2001) that documents and tracks the Italian-American gangster stereotype in Hollywood films.

The institute, which reviewed 1,220 of the Italian-related American-made movies made since 1928, found that 40 percent of them depicted Italian Americans as gangsters.

AURORA

We would like to thank our outstanding staff for an exceptional year:

Bronx SitesTeachers

Rose Baranin
 Antonia DeGennaro
 Elvira Lonardo
 Francesco Mazzucca
 Maria Valente

Assistant Teachers

Pasquale Cioce
 Nicole Fideleo
 Janitza Melo
 Rosa Merenda

Brooklyn SitesTeachers

Maryann DeTrizio
 Adriana Rosabianca

Assistant Teachers

Sarah Abouelela
 Dorotea Barbara
 Giovanna Pietanza
 Florinda Zambito

Floral Park SiteTeacher

Donna Fontanetta

Kings Park SiteTeacher

Maria Misso

Assistant Teacher

Gail Hessel

New Hyde Park SiteTeacher

Anita Caronna

Assistant Teacher

Ida Iacovino

New Rochelle SiteTeacher

Diana Maria Isola

Assistant Teacher

Stephanie Papetti

Queens SiteTeacher

Carla Rocco

Assistant Teacher

Vincenza Boniello

Staten Island SitesTeachers

Raquel D'Ambruoso
 Joanne Capolongo
 Lauren Ingravallo
 Lina Rocchio

Assistant Teachers

Rosanna Bonavita
 Elizabeth Fanizza
 Francesca Gallucci
 Nicole Leonardi

West Hempstead SiteTeacher

Josephine Maietta

Assistant Teacher

Elizabeth Cascio-Anteri

Program Director: Tony DeNonno

Site Directors: Nat Alvich, Rosa Merenda, John Misso, Antonina Polemini,
 Wanda Radetti

THE 2000-2001 AURORA SEASON IN PICTURES



Kings Park Class Graduation



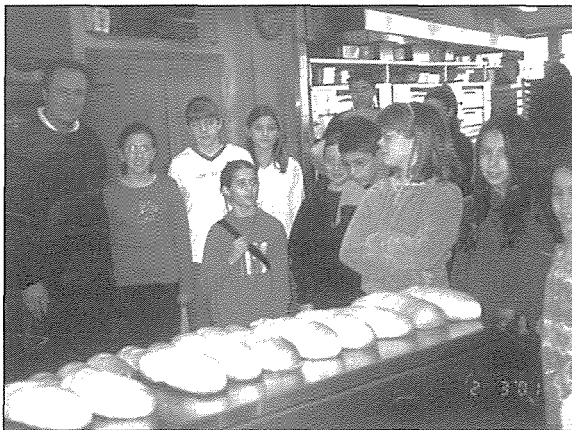
Staten Island Classes at St. Joseph/St. Thomas School



**Staten Island Classes - Holy Rosary School
and St. Joseph/St. Thomas School**



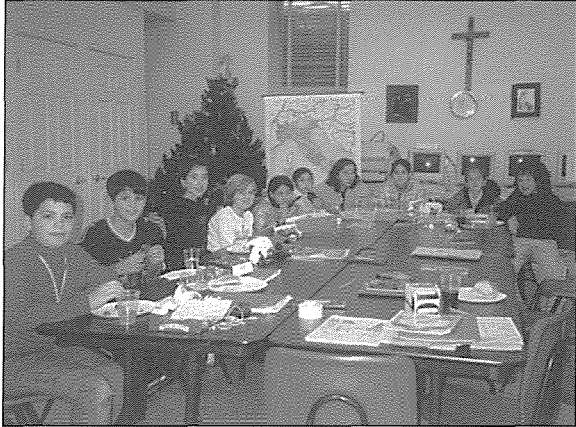
**West Hempstead Class Thanking
Peski for His Generous Donation**



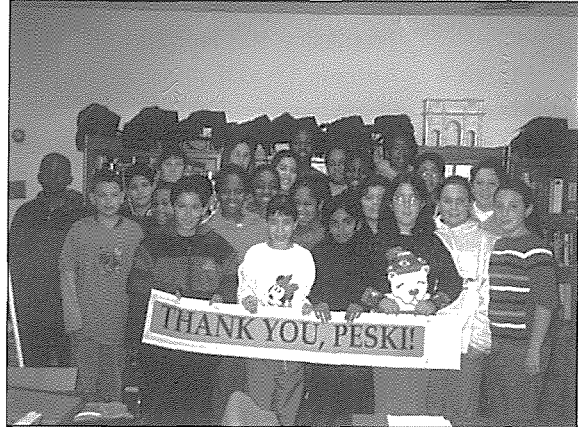
**New Hyde Park Class Learning
Bread Making At Umberto's Restaurant**



**Brooklyn Class #1 at Xaverian H.S. with Tony DeNonno
Accepting Donation from FIERI Brooklyn**



West Hempstead Class



**Floral Park Class Thanking Peski
For His Generous Donation**



Queens Class Graduation



**Dignitaries & Local Gov't. Officials with Aurora
Color Guard at Graduation for Nassau Classes**



**Graduation of Brooklyn Class #2
Xaverian High School**



**Christmas Party at
New Hyde Park Class**

MARCH ALMANAC

- March 1** - The late national sports broadcaster **Harry Caray** (born **Carabina**) was born in St. Louis in 1920.
- The late Judge **John Sirica**, who broke the Watergate Scandal that destroyed the Nixon presidency, was born in 1904.
- March 4** - **Antonio Vivaldi**, classical composer of "The Four Seasons," was born in 1678.
- March 6** - Comedian **Lou Costello**, of **Abbott & Costello**, was born in 1908.
- March 9** - Queen Mary of Scotland's advisor **David Rizzio** was murdered by her jealous husband in 1566.
- March 10** - **Marcello Malpighi**, founder of the science of microscopic anatomy, was born in 1628.
- March 11** - Supreme Court Justice **Antonin Scalia** was born in 1936.
- March 13** - **Joe Bellino** was born in 1938. He was the first U.S. Naval Cadet to receive football's Heisman Trophy in 1960.
- March 14** - Eleven Italian-Americans were murdered by a New Orleans mob on this date in 1891. Although they were found innocent in a court of law, the mob considered them *mafiosi* who assassinated the City's crooked sheriff.
- March 15** - **Julius Caesar** was assassinated by members of the Roman Senate who feared his dictatorship.
- March 18** - **Antonio Savati** was born in 1816. He established the island of Murano in Venice as the center of Italian glass manufacturing for mass production.
- March 19** - St. Joseph's Day when the birds fly back to **Capistrano**, CA. The city was named for an Italian saint.
- March 23** - **Mussolini** founded the Fascist Party in 1919 in Milan to combat a Communist takeover of Italy.
- March 24** - Civil rights activist **Viola Liuzzo** was murdered by white racists in the South in 1965.
- March 30** - A popular uprising in Palermo, Sicily, to oust the French occupiers began in 1282. The rebellion is known as the **Sicilian Vespers**.

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