

The Founders' Log

No. 22

Published by the Italic Institute of America, Council of Governors

August 2005

Founders of the Italic Institute of America, 1987

Stefano Gristina

Carl Pescosolido
(deceased)

John Mancini

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Member,

Shark Tale is in the news again. It is the focus of an evolving scandal on Wall Street concerning the seamy side of DreamWorks. It's not about ethnic stereotypes but about DreamWorks founders Steven Spielberg and Jeffrey Katzenberg and how they misled investors concerning the cost to make and promote *Shark Tale*. DreamWorks stock tumbled 27% and a new stock offering has been cancelled. I relate this to you as more confirmation that our community leaders were on the right track in exposing Spielberg & company as the schlockmeisters they are. The problem, of course, was that no one took us seriously. Had we mobilized our apathetic national politicians and *prominenti*, as planned, we could well have put DreamWorks under the microscope before it went public. So much of their Wall Street scam was based on *Shark Tale's* success. As they say: we snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. Charities and bureaucracies are not built to fight.

Speaking of that, bureaucratically, we are far behind other major organizations in the Italian American community. While some of them own their own buildings and employ full-time staffs we get by with a couple of part-time administrative assistants and some old computers. But of all the Italian American organizations in existence today, the Italic Institute is the closest to a "think tank." You see it in *The Italic Way* magazine, in the articles and letters we get published in newspapers around the country, in the struggles we undertake (like *Shark Tale*) and in our *Aurora Education Program*. Unfortunately, although we act globally we must also think frugally. Let me elucidate.

Corporate Realities

We started the Italic Institute with a dinner dance at the Waldorf Astoria in 1988. As the years progressed it became more difficult to focus on the original mission. The simple fundraising dinner evolved into the black tie gala and with it came the high-priced floral arrangements, the expensive cocktail hour and the Viennese dessert bar. Net profits became the target of unrelated charitable solicitations. We were slowly becoming a vehicle for other people's priorities, unrelated to Italic studies. Not surprisingly, this is a serious shortcoming in other organizations as well. To stay solvent they must bend with every wind so that the money keeps flowing in. Their mission becomes secondary to their overhead. Photo-ops, glowing press releases and large donations to medical charities replace the original mission of ethnic progress.

We founded the Italic Institute as an alternative to this mentality. However, regardless of the size or mission, every Italian American corporate non-profit needs to pass muster with the federal and state governments. The Italic Institute pays between \$5,000 and \$10,000 each year just to file income, expense and payroll reports with government agencies. We sacrificed our rented office to pay for accounting fees. We spend countless hours applying for grants and fulfilling the reporting requirements in order to actually receive government funding for our *Aurora Education Program*. Our charitable status (501c3) is precious to us, as much as our heritage. But it doesn't come cheap. We often run up loans to finance *Aurora* until grant money arrives, paying burdensome interest. But who else in the Italian American community does what we do to preserve and protect the Italian heritage?

The Politics of Aurora

The secret of our *Aurora Education Program* is public funding. *Aurora* wouldn't exist without it. *Aurora* is a mini-school system, not a cash-and-carry scholarship side business that other organizations use to dazzle their members. Scholarships acculturate no one and the money comes out of private pockets. Cultural education can only come through a school or cultural center and is eligible for public grants. Although we can tap into public sources the problem is to survive while awaiting grant money. That is why we depend on our member donations to help fill the gap.

Here are some of the proud Italian American legislators that have served their constituents and promoted Italian language and culture through the *Aurora Education Program*:

Michael Balboni
Long Island

Anthony D'Urso
Long Island

Vincent J. Gentile (I), Brooklyn
with *Aurora* Dir. Tony DeNonno

Martin J. Golden
Brooklyn

John J. Marchi
Staten Island

Madeline Provenzano
Bronx

Competing For Dollars

For our Institute to stay vital and to grow we need to attract wealthy donors. But, reaching the wealthy is quite a frustrating proposition. The Italic Institute has little name recognition and absolutely no advertising budget. We haven't yet found that one rich and famous patron who can lead us to his other rich friends. The Jewish practitioners of Kabbalah lucked out when vocalist Madonna Ciccone got hooked on their message. She has since poured millions into the cult. Or how about Boys Town of Italy? The very name has cache` value that attracts the wealthy like flies. Yet, the only thing Italian about it is its location. It serves mostly non-Italian children in Italy.

Do you know that there are seven Italian Americans on the Forbes list of wealthiest Americans? One of them made his fortune operating Spanish language television. Not one of the seven significantly underwrites any Italian American non-profit organization. Their philanthropic priorities are elsewhere. That puts the burden on the few committed but definitely middle class Italian Americans. Clearly, little Italic wealth trickles down to the organizations that need it.

Ethnic Anecdotes

While Italian Americans continue to struggle to preserve their positive heritage, we have to admire how other ethnic groups manage to score goals without trying. Check these out:

- A Turk-American college student at New York University defrauded \$7 million from investors recently. He donated \$1.25 million of this to NYU for a professorship in Ottoman studies. (Even a Turkish crook gives back to his community. Image-thieves Coppola, Puzo, and Scorsese never gave back a dime.)
- The PBS series *The Appalachians* aims to rectify the tattered image of Germans, English, Welsh and Scots-Irish, who "...have gotten a supremely raw deal from the news media," according to a *NY Times* television review. (Where do we sign up for a television special? Victoria Gotti need not apply.)
- Judean American politicians will soon help peddle a new Israeli request for \$2 billion in U.S. taxpayer money to develop the Negev desert to repatriate illegal Israeli colonists from Gaza. Americans already give \$3 billion a year to Israel and a lesser amount to Palestinians and Egyptians. We have given Israel \$100 billion since 1948 and \$1 million to Steven Spielberg for a Holocaust project.
- The White House publicly denounced the Mexican government's issuing of postage stamps depicting a stereotypical Negro cartoon figure named Memin Penguin. President Bush's spokesman said, "Images such as these have no place in today's world." Hey, remember Spielberg's *Shark Tale*? Our government was totally oblivious to our complaint of Italian mobster sharks in a kid's animation. How many Mexican kids watch postage stamps? How many have already watched the Spanish version of *Shark Tale*?
- Ireland, which fueled its economic growth with European Union money, managed to squeeze the Union to recognize Gaelic as an official Union language. It will cost the Italians and other members some \$4 million each year to hire 30 Gaelic speakers to translate European documents into the nearly extinct language. (What's the Gaelic word for chutzpa?)
- The Italian government has given over a million dollars to subsidize Italian language programs in some American schools. It was hoping that American school boards would

assume the cost after a short period. Well, the Americans didn't take the bait. So, now the Italian government is leaning on Italian Americans to foot the bills (\$100,000 this year). In short, now the Italians are "taxing" us for our own schools.

It never ceases to amaze me how illogical life can be. But the truth is if everything were logical we wouldn't need an Italic Institute. Logic, like truth, needs to overcome myths, politics and apathy. And, overcome them we will...with your help.

Warmest regards,

John Mancini

Italic Institute of America

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VICE PRESIDENT BILL DAL CERRO REPORTS ON HIS TRAVELS

As a suburban high school teacher outside of Chicago, I have been given the luxury of time (if not money); essentially, this means that I get a wee bit more "r & r" (rest and relaxation) space than most American workers. So I spent some of it – an entire week of my Spring Break in late March of 2005 – exploring many of the Italian regions around Lago di Garda and Lago di Como (Desenzano, Gardone, Salo and Como/Bellagio). Even dampened by drizzly, overcast weather the natural beauty of Italy cast a spell. The 18th century German writer Goethe, who spent time in Como, remarked that "he who has seen Italy has seen perfection" --- a remark for the ages.

Politically, it was an interesting time to be there. Regional elections were in full swing, many of them viewed as a referendum on Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's ability to maintain his grip on his governmental coalition. Huge, colorful posters were seen on billboards everywhere, urging Italian citizens to vote for a myriad of candidates. And in the subway terminal in Milan, large-screen TVs flashed not slick campaign ads but quick "GO VOTE" messages in-between news and weather reports. In Italy, it seems, citizens are entrusted to make up their own minds rather than respond to endless media manipulation.

As for the people, it was very obvious, from my last trip to Italy (2002), that *la bell'italia* is fast-becoming the new *l'America*. There was a time that Gypsies were considered a minority in Italy;

now, they're a minority within a minority. Africans, Albanians, Moroccans and (especially) Asians can be seen in huge numbers in both the big cities and, to a lesser extent, the small towns. Certainly, trains are the preferred mode of transportation for these new immigrants, but it's a bit disappointing to Americans like me who miss one of the former charms of Italy: casual, spontaneous train conversations with Italian locals. I was often the only person of European/North American extraction during my numerous train rides. Not that the non-Europeans weren't friendly, or that they didn't speak Italian; but, the conversations got very repetitive, very fast: "I am in Italy looking for work." Imagine trying to learn about America from people who've only recently arrived here. Not quite the same, is it?

When encountered on the streets, however, the Italian people were their usual relaxed, friendly selves. I happened to be there during Easter Week, and, in addition to disarming smiles (we Americans tend to growl at each other), Italians would add a "*Buona Pasqua*" or "*pace*" to their "*buon giorno*" or "*salve*." For reasons I still can't quite fathom, the effect was instantly soothing.

When I returned to the United States I had occasion to visit Baltimore where I accidentally found the brand new Museum of African American Heritage. This museum was first endowed by millionaire Reg Lewis, the first black to own a Fortune 500 company. When he learned that he had a brain tumor a few years ago (tragically, it took his life a year later—he died at 50), he wanted to "give back" to his community, so he gave \$5 million. The State of Maryland kicked in another \$30 million and *voilà*, a huge new edifice, in bold red/black/green colors, filled with memorabilia, history, videos, PLENTY of tourists, etc. The state also picks up 75% of the museum's operating costs. And note: The Smithsonian in D.C. is already planning ITS own African American museum!

The lesson is: African Americans, and others, build living monuments to their heritage; we Italian Americans celebrate our heritage only in restaurants and at dinner dances. Thinking from our stomachs, rather than our hearts, is no way to keep a great heritage alive.

NATIONAL APPEAL

We would like to thank the following members and organizations for their donations:

Special Friends of the Institute (\$5,000 +)

HealthPlus PHSP, Inc.

John & Rita Mancini

New York State Department of Education

Guardians of the Italian Heritage (\$1,000 +)

Stephen R. Aiello

New York City

Valtech Research (Nicholas Valastro)

Builders of Italic Pride (\$500 +)

Italian Club of Staten Island Foundation
George P. Ricci

Patrons of Italian Heritage (\$250 +)

Sustainers of the Institute (\$100 +)

Charles J. Cerutti
Frank D. DeJute
Faicco Pork Stores
John Garretto
Maria Gloria
Mario B. Ignani
Long Island Society of Italian Americans
Angelo & Aida Mele
Gennaro Pupa
Joseph A. Rube, Jr.
Carlo & Anne Simoni
John Villanella

Supporters of the Institute (\$50 +)

Joel Catania
Charles J. Cerutti
Olga DeLuise
George DiScala
F.S.A. of Westchester Community College, Inc.
Long Island Society of Italian Americans
Louis E. Pelfini, MD
Maria C. Poulos
Joseph Sciamè
Richard J. Vannucci

Friends of the Institute (25+)

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(to donate a car or boat call 800-320-0476)

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Card # _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____ Amount \$ _____

Name _____

Please mail to: Italic Institute of America

P.O. Box 818

Address _____

Floral Park, NY 11002

Your donation will be used to support *Aurora* Italic Education, *The Italic Way* Magazine, and Anti-Defamation Activities (*Project Italia*).

NEW MEMBERS

The Institute welcomes the following new members:

M/M Roberto Ambrosio	West Hempstead, NY	Dominick Graziano	Tampa, FL
Grace Barahona	Brooklyn, NY	Catherine Heffernan	Bronx, NY
Bevilacqua Family	Elmont, NY	Pi Fe Inay-Hu	Hicksville, NY
Lionel Bottari	Chicago, IL	Zubaina Khanum	Brooklyn, NY
M/M John Cacciapuoti	Staten Island, NY	Lydia Krawec	Floral Park, NY
Geraldine L. Capozzi	Bronx, NY	Josephine Licata	New Hyde Park, NY
Caruso Family	Stony Brook, NY	Longobardi Family	Floral Park, NY
M/M George Chavez	Hicksville, NY	Mary Jane Mangialino	New Hyde Park, NY
M/M James Chiariello	Bronx, NY	L.T. Maresco	Brooklyn, NY
Anthony J. Cipriano	Floral Park, NY	Mary Mariano	Brooklyn, NY
Teresa E. Ciurleo	North Babylon, NY	Joseph P. Morsellino	New York, NY
Joseph Comisi	Brooklyn, NY	Maria O'Grady	Floral Park, NY
Ismenia DeCastro	Garden City Park, NY	Jack Pace	Chicago, IL
Maria DeMartis	Bronx, NY	Maria Palmieri	Brooklyn, NY
M/M Carl DeSciara	Brooklyn, NY	Nicholas Pertoso	Bayside, NY
M/M Frank DiPiazza	Hayward, CA	Peter Rosella	York, PA
Frank DiPiero	Norridge, IL	Sandra Rossano	Brooklyn, NY
George DiScala	New Hyde Park, NY	Dolores Schiele	Staten Island, NY
Early Family	Floral Park, NY	Sette Family	Bronx, NY
Josephine Fanelli	Bronx, NY	Marie Sidoti	Brooklyn, NY
Marie Frasca	Brooklyn, NY	M/M Giuseppe Sindoni	Floral Park, NY
George M. Gaudio, Jr.	Inverness, IL	Dolores Stimitz	Bayside, NY
Carol Giancola	Floral Park, NY	Anthony Vaglica	New Hyde Park, NY
Magdaline Giordano	Bronx, NY	Loretta Zaino	Bronx, NY
Giuseppe Grasso	San Rafael, CA		

AL CARDONE OF OUR ADVISORY COUNCIL REPORTS ON HIS TRIP TO ITALY

My family and I had the pleasure of visiting Venice, Florence and Rome recently. It was a magnificent trip, and we all enjoyed Italy's unparalleled historical, artistic and architectural treasures. Visiting these cities makes clear what a great debt Western civilization owes to the Italian people.

One of the most striking differences we noticed between the United States and Italy is the less frantic and intense pace of life one encounters there. Italians are generally more civil and polite in their dealings with one another and foreign guests. Whether asking directions in the street, visiting a tourist attraction or being served in a restaurant, one cannot help but notice a more relaxed, friendly and balanced approach to life. The practice of strolling through the streets and gathering in the piazzas to dine, socialize or listen to music impressed me as especially pleasant and civilized.

The trains we took to travel from one city to another were fast, comfortable and punctual, which made it all the more enjoyable to view the picturesque cities, towns and countryside along the way. I would describe the cities themselves as cleaner and safer than what we are accustomed to in the United States. I was sorry, however, to see graffiti on the walls of a number of buildings in Venice, Florence and Rome. The fact that some of this graffiti was political in nature did not make it any less ugly. Each city also had its share of unlicensed street vendors from Africa and the Asian sub-continent.

My sense of the political situation is that popular support continues to shift from the center right coalition to the center left. Most Italians I spoke to expected Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's coalition to lose power in the next national election. His allegiance to President Bush and his policy in Iraq were often mentioned as key complaints. Although the cost of living in Italy is high, I observed that the standard of living is attractive.

All things considered, Italy may have lost some of its tranquil old world charm, and it has not been able to entirely escape the problems afflicting modern society. Nonetheless, Italy still provides a refreshing opportunity to experience a more friendly, charming and picturesque society.

Italic Institute of America, Inc.

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