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No. 24

The Officers' Log

CHICAGO FILM PROJECT

A Tale of Two TV Stations

By Bill Dal Cerro, Vice President

In our last *Officers' Log*, it was noted that the Italic Institute of America (IIA) is working in collaboration with award-winning producer/filmmaker Gia Amella (through her firm ModioMedia LLC) on an historic film documentary with local PBS Station Channel 11 (Chicago) called *And They Came to Chicago: The Italian American Legacy*. I will co-write the script with Ms. Amella, an artist whose talents have already been proven via a previous ethnic-themed documentary, *The German Americans*, that she made for WLIW, Long Island.

But, as they say in the film industry, "Cut!" Thanks largely to Ms. Amella's fundraising and marketing skills, word about the project got out to local NBC affiliate Channel 5. Indeed, the



Bill DalCerro, Gia Amella, Don Fiore (Vice Chrm.)

president of NBC Chicago, Larry Wert, personally called Ms. Amella to declare his station's interest in airing the program. The bottom line: Channels 5 and 11 are now involved in a bidding tug-of-war, each seeking to offer ModioMedia and IIA a sweeter deal in terms of sponsor, promotion and, eventually, prime airtime.

"It's a great position to be in," says Amella, who, along with associate producer Michelle Ferrell had already started a successful

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WE CAN LEARN FROM THE GREEKS

By John Mancini, Executive Director

Those of you who have seen the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* may recall the last scene in which the mixed-marriage couple is taking their daughter to Greek School. The overriding message is that Greek culture triumphed regardless of the light-hearted derision it took in the film. Clearly, having Greek Schools demonstrates that Greek Americans take their heritage seriously. It is a secular heritage that is paired with a proprietary church and financially sustained by a formidable partnership of Greek American families, the Orthodox Church, and the Greek government. It is the rare Greek American child who escapes this cultural triangle. The results are impressive. Ancient Hellas is held in reverence and a sojourn to modern Greece is a family requirement. The typical Greek School is founded on seven pillars of wisdom: Greek language, Greek Orthodox faith, Greek geography, Greek history, Greek folklore, Greek manners & character, and social development (i.e., "how to marry a Greek").

Has this cultural focus made Greek Americans any less assimilated than Italian Americans? Of course not. They are equally assimilated with less *impedimenta* than we drag about with our mafia-movie subculture. The real problem for us is convincing our community that such a thing as an "Italian School" is preferable to off-you-go scholarships.

Our *Aurora Program* is an Italian School for pre-teens, the only one of its kind to teach standardized language, history, culture, music, geography and cuisine at multiple sites. Ironically, in the eighteen years of its existence *Aurora* has attracted many non-Italic children. Let's face it, Italian culture has much *cachè* value to other ethnic groups. We hear it all the time

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

George P. Ricci

Primavera greetings to all in this season of rebirth and fecundity! It is a time to reflect and to restart. Fittingly, it is the time when our officers, including me, begin their terms.

Looking back over the nearly twenty years of the Institute, there is much of which to be proud. Through the endeavors of the founders, officers and cohorts of dedicated members, the Institute has left its indelible imprint. Unique in its perspective, it has championed all things Italic, reminding all who will hear of a rich heritage passed down over the millennia.

Sure, there have been the inevitable setbacks, disappointments, and discouragements. But there have been the far greater triumphs. Memorable to me are the Waldorf-Astoria Grand Ballroom dinners; those splendid events that not only gave long overdue recognition to many of Italian heritage, but also raised much needed funds to launch the Institute's many initiatives.

Of those initiatives, one that is sure to have a lasting impact is the *Aurora Program*. Ambitious in scope, professional in execution, these classes reach those minds untainted by the prejudiced attitudes with which we had to cope growing up in the 50's and 60's. Drawing from all ethnic groups, the children in these classes are not just exposed to Italian history, language, geography and cuisine, but are imbued with the sense of beauty and humanism which is part and parcel of Italian culture. These children are the future of the Institute.

Though much is taken, much abides, and the coming year promises to be an exciting one. I can



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Preserving The Italic Way

by Anthony Vecchione

Through the years *The Italic Way* magazine has enlightened its readers. Through feature articles, commentary and reader feedback, *The Italic Way*, more than any other publication, has conveyed Italic culture at its best, spotlighting the lesser-known contributions of our people to American life. However, fewer issues of *The Italic Way* have been published recently, certainly not due to a lack of ideas in which to fill its pages. But higher printing and mailing costs and a dearth of full-time staff has taken its toll.

This is unfortunate. Because the Italic Institute is primarily an educational and media organization, disseminating information is paramount to its mission. Publishing a magazine on a quarterly basis is not a lot to ask. Nor is it an impossible goal. The mainstream media with its legions of professional writers and huge budgets have managed to help shape the image of Italian-Americans, an image that is far removed from reality. *The Italic Way* is one of the few vehicles that can help to balance that false and damaging image. A quick look through the pages of past issues confirms how vital a role it has played in setting the record straight. While the mainstream media, both in the states and in Europe, tend to embellish negative images of Italy or focus only on art and crime, articles in *The Italic Way* place Italy and all things Italian in their proper perspective. This is most evident in the way that the Roman Empire is depicted by mainstream media. The Empire and its rulers are often seen as ruthless, gluttonous and perverse. Articles that have graced the pages of *The Italic Way*, on the other hand, have shown a more even-handed representation of Rome including the positive influence of its government, law and humanism on Western traditions as well as its political impact, sometimes negative, on today's world affairs.

Let's face it, a fair, balanced and accurate portrayal of Italian-Americans has never been more needed than right now! The gangster, lowlife, or buffoon image of Italian Americans has become nothing less than an endemic stereotype that shows no signs of abating anytime soon. The need to dispel the myths and gross exaggerations is more pressing than ever. *The Italic Way* can help to accomplish that. It can have the power to influence, educate and inspire its readers with a combination of good journalism, accurate historical perspective and do it all with a little wit and charm. We need to find the resources to make our magazine more timely, more extensively read and more influential in American society. ****

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Meet the New Team

We call them elections but they are more akin to acclamations. That's what happens when everyone is in ideological synch and there are enough positions to go around. Constitutionally, our Core Council members have the privilege of voting and confirming various candidates. But, there was a consensus among the candidates. In that case, the Financial Secretary (Alfred Cardone) is given the power to certify elections, which he has done. That said, here are our leaders, commencing March 2nd, for 2006 - 2008. Mindful of the need to bring a new generation into the Institute, the officers have set a priority on re-organizing the Core Council committee chairs and Program directorships. Appointments will be announced in the next *Log*.

President George P. Ricci served as Treasurer in the 1990's and has been our attorney and Core Member since the founding. Resides on Long Island.



Vice President Bill Dal Cerro continues another term as Vice President, Midwest Representative and Associate Editor of *The Italic Way*. Resides in Chicago.



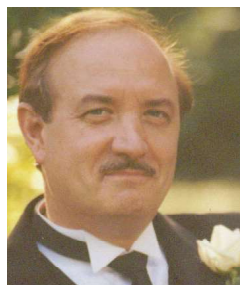
Treasurer Anthony Vecchione joined the Core Council over a year ago and is a feature writer for *The Italic Way*. Resides in New Jersey.



Financial Secretary Alfred Cardone continues another term as Financial Secretary. Serves on the Advisory Council. Resides in Westchester County, NY.



Executive Director John Mancini continues to oversee all the Institute operations and programs. Serves as Co-Founder/Chairman of the Council of Governors. Resides on Long Island.



Dispatch from Italy



by Bob Masullo, Advisory Council

Watching the 2006 election in Italy as an Italian American was as dispiriting as watching the 2000 and 2004 U.S. elections as an American citizen.

Economist and former college professor Romano Prodi, who won, but just barely (by 24,755 votes out of more than 38,000,000 cast), will have his work cut out for him. He conducted his campaign as a gentleman and offered intelligent, if not new or exciting ideas.

His best moment came in the first of two nationally televised debates when after listening to his opponent, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, denounce the current state of the government, said in effect, "You're talking like someone else is prime minister, not someone who has been in charge of things for the last five years."

Berlusconi, the billionaire media mogul, tried to bully his way to a second term, comparing himself to Napoleon and Jesus Christ. He relied on usual rightwing ploys (fears of communism, taxes and homosexuals), challenged the results, and even two weeks after the election refused to acknowledge his defeat even though it had been confirmed by Italy's top court. He promised not to accept the will of the people but to do everything to make Prodi's tenure difficult. A real class act.

Italy would be well rid of Berlusconi, but unfortunately he will not go away. There is some ironic justice, though, in the fact that two laws he pushed through (so-called proportional representation in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house, and allowing Italians living abroad to vote in national elections) boomeranged and wound up helping Prodi.

The proportional law gave Prodi's coalition a larger share of the seats in the lower house than it would have gotten under the old system and the votes from Italians abroad gave it the majority in the Senate, the upper house, but again, just barely (158 to 156).

In short, this election was not one that inspired pride in the Italic soul. ****



Vice Chairman (Council of Governors) Don Fiore served as President. Now serves as Midwest Vice President, Advisory Council and staff writer of *The Italic Way*. Resides in Chicago.



Vice Chairman (Council of Governors) Rosario A. Iaconis served as President and Director of *The Italic Way*. Resides on Long Island.

Chicago Film (from p. 1)

fundraising drive for the show's budget of \$250,000 via a small-scale luncheon in downtown Chicago on March 10th. That luncheon, graciously hosted at the elegant Union League Club by attorney Ted Grippo of the Chicago-based American Italian Defense Association (AIDA), yielded a generous pledge from attorney Nick DiGiovanni and another from the Marchegiana Society. Ms. Amella and I have also been asked to speak to the leadership of other local Italian American organizations.

More important, Toni Falvo, NBC's Director of Research, Programming and Press, was also in attendance. Ms. Falvo was obviously moved by our description of the project and encouraged us to keep NBC in the loop. Her boss, Larry Wert, was raised by an Italian mother and grandmother. His passion in wanting to produce this program on Channel 5 parallels one of the goals which ModioMedia and IIA hope to accomplish with the film – namely, a chance to rekindle a sense of *italianità* among third and fourth generation Italian Americans, allowing them to both honor their ancestors as well as preserve our culture for future generations.

"The time we have spent creating a buzz within the Italian American community is finally bearing fruit and we are eager to move into production as quickly as possible," offered Amella. "Now that we are witnessing some heated competition between the two networks, networks that are radically different – PBS vs. Commercial – it really hits home that our timing is good. A commercial broadcast will clearly give us a much larger audience and access to major sponsors. But, we really want to make the film available to both the public and private sector knowing that each may have a different audience."

Another major coup for our side was the recent addition to ModioMedia's staff of former WLIW special projects producer Ben Patton. With his wealth of marketing and fundraising experience, *And They Came To Chicago* is moving much closer to its goal of being broadcast in late 2006.

Whether the film is shown on Channel 5 (NBC) or Channel 11 (PBS), it will be a milestone in local programming history – the first-ever documentary highlighting the history of Italian Americans in Chicago. In short: We're not just documenting history, we're making history.

To support the *And They Came to Chicago* documentary, visit www.modiomedia.com or call (312) 867-1644. All contributions to the **Italic Institute** are fully tax-deductible. ****

Learn from the Greeks (from p. 1)

from Hispanic, Irish, Asian and African American parents. Just the name "Italian" excites people to enroll their children. The only people who are not excited about an Italian School are Italian American leaders and most of our social groups. One wonders how the Greeks would fare with such leadership.

Here is a sampling of the feedback we get from kids and parents:

"Thank you so much for having this Italian class. I couldn't use my time any different!!! *Grazie!!!* From Sabina Ruggles." "Thank you for teaching me about the Italian language and culture. I really am happy to have learned a wonderful language from such great teachers like you! *GRAZIE.* From Michele (Michael) Lopez". "*Caro maestro, Grazie per tutti le lezioni d'italiano.* Marco Liotta" "*Caro maestro, Abbiamo imparato*

molto! Ciao. (Caterina è Ciata)" "This was a fantastic experience for my children. I wish success for the Aurora Program. Please let me know if there is any other Italian program that would interest them. The teachers were exceptional, the best. The kids loved it! Thank you for a great program. Thank you. Luciana D'Alessandro."

Note: These youngsters are just some of the 200 students who recently completed our Introductory Level. Can we offer them the new Advanced Level this fall, or do they just drift away? Stay tuned. ****

President's Message (from p.1)

hardly wait to read Rosario Iaconis' next epistle in the mass media; to be startled by the inevitable sprouting of ideas from John Mancini's fertile mind; and to follow the progress of the ambitious film project undertaken by our energetic Chicago leadership: Gia Amella, Bill Dal Cerro and Don Fiore. I also look forward to working with Tony Vecchione, our new Treasurer, Alfred Cardone, our stalwart Financial Secretary, and our soon-to-be-named directors and deputies.

And let us not overlook those who keep the Institute's day-to-day machinery running smoothly – Rita Mancini and Maria Peluso - many thanks to you.

To one and all, I promise to use the next two years of my presidency to solidify our gains and expand our success. ****

YES!

**I share the values
of the Italic Institute.**

Enroll me as a member [\$20]

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Raffle Winners!



Winning tickets were drawn by students at the Advanced *Aurora* class in Garden City Park, NY, on March 11, 2006.

First Prize (\$500)

Second Prize (\$250)

Third Prize (\$150)

Fourth Prize (\$100)

Salvatore Spano, Dix Hills, NY

Fernando Vicoli, Staten Island, NY

Melissa Franz, Brooklyn, NY

Robert D'Alessandro, Franklin Sq., NY