



April, 2007  
No. 27

# The Officers' Log

## AURORA'S ROCKY ROAD

By John Mancini, Executive Director

Running a school system is tough enough but to lose funding midway through a term hurts the students as much as the school. So it was this year when some \$25,000 in legislative grants were lost.

The Institute's *Aurora Youth Program* began the 2006/07 school year with a budget of \$60,000 and eleven classes. By January, word came that administrative errors on the part of some of our legislators reduced our funding by 40%. We immediately shut down three classes to the shock of parents and students alike. It was the very first time in our twenty-year history that classes had to be suspended.

What caused the problem? The Institute deals with a number of state and city legislators in offering *Aurora* to the community at no cost. In the case of New York City, three different City Council members had sent us letters each proudly claiming a \$10,000 grant from the City Council for Brooklyn and Queens, total \$30,000. What they failed to communicate was that only \$15,000 was actually allocated by the Council and all three took credit for the same grant. In Nassau County, our home district, State Senator Michael Balboni who underwrote last year's program for \$10,000 was tapped to be the state's Homeland Security Chief and resigned his senate seat. During this time, his staff had neglected to lobby for our funding and \$10,000 fell through the legislative cracks.

Although we reopened two of the three suspended classes and continued operating the other eight, funding now came from loans and parent donations. Along the way,

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Johnny and Marina Levato accept the Institute's Silver Medallion as Guardians of the Italian Heritage

## BATAVIA ACTIVISTS HONORED

By Don Fiore, Vice Chairman Midwest

The Institute had two objectives when we assembled a coalition of attorneys and representatives of leading Italian American organizations in response to the Rotolo Middle School incident in Batavia, Illinois in late 2006.

The first was to explore the possibilities of further legal action against the Batavia School District for its deliberate and unabashed propagation of defamatory Italian American stereotypes to minors.

The second objective was to provide support for the Italian American family that brought the school's actions to light and consequently found themselves isolated and ostracized by the local community as a result.

We are happy to report that at least the second objective was fulfilled on February 25th, 2007 when coalition representatives

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## FILM NEARS COMPLETION

Airdates set for *Italians in Chicago*  
film

by Bill Dal Cerro

Airdates have been set for *And They Came to Chicago: The Italian American Legacy*, a one-hour documentary produced, written and directed by filmmaker Gia Amella of ModioMedia LLC. Now in its final post-production (editing) phases, *And They Came to Chicago* is set to air on two separate local TV stations: first on commercial NBC Channel 5 (Sunday, May 27<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 pm, again on Monday, May 28<sup>th</sup> at 12:00 pm), then on PBS station WTTW Channel 11 (Tuesday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 pm, in a longer version).

The film, for which the Italic Institute



This Columbus Day Parade is one of the many scenes captured in *And They Came to Chicago*.

serves as fiscal sponsor, is narrated by actor and Chicago native Joe Mantegna (*Uncle Nino* and TV's *Joan of Arcadia*). Through a combination of archival footage, personal photographs and on-camera interviews, *And They Came to Chicago* chronicles the struggles and triumphs of the Italian immigrants who transformed Chicago into

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# SUSTAINING THE CAUSE

The Institute gratefully thanks the following donors:

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

Gonnella Baking Co.

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

Cellini Lodge #2206 OSIA  
New York City (Councilman J. Vacca)  
New York State (Sen. M. Balboni)

## Builders of Italic Pride (\$500 +)

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## Sustainers of the Institute (\$100 +)

Dorothy P. Elarde	Gennaro Pupa
Jt. Civic Comm. of Italian Americans, Womens Div.	Mr. & Mrs. Nicholas Roti
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## YES! I share the values of the Italic Institute.

\_\_\_ Enroll me as a member (\$20 check enclosed)

\_\_\_ Enclosed is a donation (tax deductible) of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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**PO Box 818**  
**Floral Park, NY 11002**  
**Tel: (516) 488-7400 Fax: (516) 488-4889**  
**Email: ItalicOne@aol.com Website: Italic.org**

## **BATAVIA**, from p. 1

presented Marina Amoroso-Levato and son Johnny with funds to help pay for private school tuition following their good conscience decision to withdraw from the Batavia public school system. Johnny is now successfully attending Aurora Christian School in the neighboring town of Aurora, Illinois. [Note the ultimate irony of Johnny attending a school named "Aurora."]

The Italic Institute and the Order of the Sons of Italy in America each contributed \$1,000 to the tuition fund. An additional \$500 was provided by UNICO, and \$250 contributed respectively by the Italian American Human Rights Foundation, and the Joint Civic committee of Italian Americans. Another \$2,000 was raised by private contributors and individual OSIA lodges. A pledge for an unspecified amount by the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) remains to be fulfilled. Marina and Johnny were also presented with the Institute's Silver Medallion Award in recognition of their courageous defense of Italic dignity by publicly objecting to the propagation of negative Italian stereotypes by Rotolo Middle School faculty and administrators. \*\*\*\*

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## **FILM**, from p. 1

America's second-largest city.

After its Midwest premiere, the film may also be shown to other television markets throughout the country. Likewise, a bi-lingual DVD version of the film will be available featuring numerous special features, including "An Interview with Joe Mantegna," "Italian American Authors," "Public Image," "Little Italys," and "History Makers."

The Institute's National Vice-President, Bill Dal Cerro, worked on the "Public Image" and "History Makers" sections of the DVD, contributed historical research throughout the production, and worked his contacts in the local media to generate publicity for the film.

Kudos to the ModioMedia team for their hard work, dedication and creativity: filmmaker Gia Amella; sound designer Beppe Mangione (Amella's husband); associate producer Michelle Ferrell; composer Mirio Cosottini; and Emmy Award winning editor Martin Nelson, who has worked with National Geographic and also edited a 2005 piece on Sarno, Italy, which Amella shot for the History Channel. And special thanks to Professor Dominic Candeloro, the local Chicago historian who served as one of the major consultants for the film.

*And They Came to Chicago* was shot in HD (High Definition), which gives the footage the clarity and depth of a feature motion picture. To view a five minute preview trailer, visit the ModioMedia team's website: [www.modiomedia.com](http://www.modiomedia.com), click on "Promotional Video."

Says John Mancini, the Institute's Chairman: "History is written by the victors. This film will be our victory statement. And we hope that the film serves as an inspiration for the kind of high-class, high-profile media initiatives so desperately needed in our community. A positive educational tool is the most powerful weapon one can wield in the seemingly endless fight against negative Italic media images." \*\*\*\*

# NEW JERSEY: FIRST, DO NO HARM

By Rosario A. Iaconis, Vice Chairman East



Actor James Gandolfini (dba Tony Soprano) in Bloomfield, Photo by Alampi

When David Chase & Co. applied for a permit to film the final episode of *The Sopranos* in downtown Bloomfield, NJ, HBO was told: *Fuhgeddaboutit!* Led by Mayor Raymond McCarthy, the town council voted to deny the permit on the grounds that the show incessantly defamed Italian Americans.

But, this victory against the forces of anti-Italian intolerance was short-lived. Caving in to pressure from the owners of Holsten's, a local ice cream parlor and the proposed site of the series final scene, the town council reversed its decision. (Supposedly, an earlier pro-*Sopranos* permit had been issued.)

Sadly, the prime mover in this *volta faccia* was none other than an Italian American—Essex County Executive Joseph Di Vincenzo. “I’m not offended by the show at all,” said Di Vincenzo a younger political leader raised in the *goomba-guido* matrix. Programmed by the likes of Coppola, Di Niro and Pesci, his generation knows next to nothing about Frank Capra, Don Ameche or even Franco Zeffirelli. Like physicians, however, our elected representatives must adhere to a strict moral code: First, do no harm.

Politicians should not be promoting bigotry in any venue. Nor should public servants aid and abet agents of intolerance. *Sopranos* creator David Chase’s quest to glorify a fictitious family of *goomba* gangsters is odious enough. That his slanderous and stereotypical program receives the imprimatur of the local government, however, lends credence to the know-nothings and calls into question the integrity of both Bloomfield and Essex County.

Had Chase & Co. helmed scenes that smacked of anti-Semitism, though, it is a near certainty that *The Sopranos* would have been “whacked”—the victim of a public rebuke by the selfsame politicians who embrace Tony, Paulie, Uncle Junior and all the other cast members of the 21st century’s whiteface minstrel show.

No doubt, HBO and David Chase concocted this conflict in order to drum up free publicity for their lurid grand finale. The previous non-Italic county executive had banned the show from Essex County.

No other ethnicity would countenance, much less encourage, similar

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# TAKE THE MONEY, LEAVE THE HERITAGE

## Reflections on the Academy Awards

By Anthony Vecchione, Treasurer

Prior to *Taxi Driver*, Academy Award winner Martin Scorsese had a few critical successes under his belt including; *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and *Mean Streets*. Although *Mean Streets* was stereotypical in its portrayal of Italian-Americans, the film was clearly Scorsese’s homage to his youth - the insular world of New York’s Little Italy where he grew up. It was a community of mostly first- and second-generation Italian Americans that also happened to produce a few sociopaths, some of whom went on to be kingpins in organized crime. Not unlike the way Tammany Hall spawned corrupt Irish-American politicians or Detroit produced Jewish gangsters known as The Purple Gang during prohibition.

The ascendancy of an Italian-American like Martin Scorsese to the elite ranks of the film industry was long overdue. Not since Frank Capra was there such a high-profile Italian-American whose art was being praised by film critics and film historians. Up until the late 1960s only a few Italian-Americans including Frank Capra, Vincente Minnelli and Henry Mancini were household names. Scorsese had the potential to become an A-team Hollywood player and a role model for other Italian-American visual artists who may have believed at the time, that a successful career in the movie business was unattainable unless they made gangster movies.

By the mid-1970s, with the release of *The Godfather* films, the image and cultural identity of Italian-Americans was beginning to take shape. Some Italian-American social scientists, artists, and academicians who quietly endured anti-Italian slurs by “politically correct” intellectuals were secretly looking to Scorsese to rescue them. But that wasn’t in the cards.

Instead of limiting his tribute to the dark side of his youth to one film, *Mean Streets*, Scorsese took a different path. He created a rogue’s gallery of viler Italian American film criminals than Puzo and Coppola had created, culminating in *GoodFellas*. Years later David Chase made Scorsese’s scoundrels your suburban neighbors with *The Sopranos*.

Despite his obsession with the Mafia and Italian-American lowlifes, in his documentary entitled *Italian-American* Scorsese presented a poignant and witty portrayal of his parents, neither of whom were undesirable or had links to organized crime. He produced the documentary *My Voyage to Italy* in which he lauds Italian cinema. But its impact and significance are lost, because no matter what Martin Scorsese does, his indelible image will forever be of a Mafia director.

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# 20th ANNIVERSARY LUNCHEON

We've rolled four celebrations into one for April 21st:

20th anniversary of the Italic Institute  
20th anniversary of the *Aurora Youth Program*  
20 Regions of Italy- Annual Flag Ceremony  
2,760th anniversary of the Founding of Rome

If you are a local member come join us for lunch.

- Watch our Aurora Color Guard perform the Roll Call of Regions. Each of Italy's twenty regions will be represented
- Meet your Institute officers
- Enjoy some comfort Italian food (catered by Gigi's, owned by two former Aurora students)
- Meet your local legislators
- Be there for the Raffle drawing

**WHEN:** Saturday, April 21, 2007, 11:30am\* – 2:00pm

**WHERE:** Knights of Columbus Hall

33 South Tyson Avenue, Floral Park, NY

**COST:** \$25 per person includes wine, beer, soda, buffet lunch and dessert

\* Aurora Ceremony starts promptly at 11:45am

Reserve now; seating is limited. Send a check to Italic Institute, PO Box 818, Floral Park, NY 11002 or call us with your AMEX card at 516.488.7400

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## RAFFLE TIME!

You will notice a raffle book enclosed with this newsletter. Ticket donations for the benefit of the *Aurora Program* are \$5 each or 6 for \$25. **First prize is \$500, second prize is \$250, third prize is \$150, and fourth prize is \$100.** The drawing will be held on April 21, 2007 at the 20th Anniversary Luncheon. The winner need not be present. Mail the ticket stubs and check to: Italic Institute of America, P.O. Box 818, Floral Park, NY 11002, or use the enclosed envelope.

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## NEW JERSEY, from p. 3

assaults. Mayor McCarthy, a non-Italian, remains a profile in courage. Di Vincenzo is a poster child for forty years of mafia-media propaganda. Elected to govern Essex County, he has instead chosen to misuse his authority by judging Italian American issues based on a *Godfather*-induced set of personal standards. He was elected to be County Executive, not an arbiter of Italian American values.

Why do Italian American voters elect such self-righteous conformists? Why, indeed, do they allow their elected representatives to fan the flames of Italophobia? \*\*\*\*\*

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## AURORA, from p. 1

donations from our national membership, State Bank of Long Island, and Cellini Lodge (Sons of Italy) in Nassau County helped to soften the blow.

Having the only such Italian after-school program in the nation weighs

## SCORSESE, from p. 3

Even Henry Hill, the main character in *GoodFellas*, came out more Italian than Irish. Perhaps to correct that oversight Scorsese turned his skills on the Irish in *Gangs of New York* and *The Departed*. Nevertheless, if the past is any judge, evil Irishmen never outlive bad Italians in American legend. Who remembers Dion O'Banion, Al Capone's murderous rival?

Scorsese represents a lost opportunity. Imagine a Scorsese version of Sacco & Vanzetti or *Vendetta*, HBO's film about the actual 1891 lynching of eleven innocent Sicilians in New Orleans. Instead of *Aviator*, his biopic of Howard Hughes, one about world famous Italian aviator Italo Balbo or American air ace Don Gentile. Even the little known mass persecution of Italian-Americans during World War II would be a great vehicle for Scorsese's story-telling skills.

Scorsese has degraded his culture, a culture that he claims to cherish. To drive home that point Scorsese lent his voice to the children's mob animation *Shark Tale* in 2005.

Hollywood is as much a propaganda machine as Madison Avenue. Scorsese has had the ability and clout throughout his career to help transform the way America views Italian-Americans. But Scorsese has known from childhood that Americans want to see bad Italians. He admits to staging gang fights in his Little Italy neighborhood when tour buses passed to satisfy the expectations of the tourists. Despite their pompous pretensions the real code of Hollywood and Marty Scorsese is not "art for art's sake" but "bread and circuses." Should Scorsese have not made *Mean Streets*? No, of course not. As Jimmy Breslin once said, everybody has an ancestor who hung from the gallows. But it's a different thing altogether to make it a life-long pursuit to perpetuate only the vile and decadent side of a culture and a people, especially when the vast majority of those people are far removed from that world. Is that not propaganda?

Marty finally got his Oscar statue and many of his admirers thought that it was well deserved. I saw it differently. When I think of Martin Scorsese I think of that line from the movie *On the Water Front* when Marlon Brando's character utters: "I could have been a contender, I could have been somebody...." You know the rest. \*\*\*\*\*

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heavily on us. Credibility and continuity are the hallmarks of a mature non-profit organization. Our mission is not galas, showy scholarships or unrelated charities. Our mission is cultural education for the next generation. Lonely though that mission is, we have never been distracted. \*\*\*\*\*