



June, 2007
No. 28

The Officers' Log

CHICAGO FILM A WRAP

Gia Amella, Executive Producer of *And They Came to Chicago*, held a Premiere Party on May 24th to introduce friends and local groups to the joint Italic Institute-ModioMedia documentary. The cocktail reception paid tribute to the movers and shakers who made the unique history of Italians in Chicago finally reach TV screens. Our own Bill Dal Cerro, IIA's National Vice President, received accolades for conceiving the project and arranging the broadcast on PBS station WTTW. Bill also brokered the Italic Institute's partnership with ModioMedia.

Dan Soles of WTTW spoke with high praise of Bill's role in creating the project and Larry Wert of NBC affiliate Channel 5 extolled Gia's professionalism in completing it.



(l-r) Institute VP Bill Dal Cerro,
Institute Chairman John Mancini,
Executive Producer of ModioMedia Gia Amella

Chairman John Mancini of IIA addressed the crowd of 250 guests, challenging them to build on the documentary by establishing an *Aurora Education Program* for the children

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VENTENNALE!

Aurora Celebrates its 20th Year



The Color Guard recruited from three of the eleven Aurora classes this season. East Coast Vice Chairman Rosario Iaconis (center) presided over the ceremony.

Reaching twenty is a big deal for any corporation when most businesses fold in the first five years. Both the Italic Institute of America and its mandated *Aurora Youth Programs* reached the twenty-year mark in 2007. And what better day to celebrate than April 21st, the birthday of Rome (2,760 years old). After all, we are the only classical Italian-American group in the nation.

While such occasions should be feasted in grand style, our old Roman virtues, not to mention our shallow pockets, pointed to a more modest celebration at the local Knights of Columbus Hall. Still, the spirit of IIA filled the room with children, families and seniors witnessing *Aurora* in action: a showcase of the 20 Italian regions by thirty members of the Aurora Color Guard. The catering, by the way, was done by two former *Aurora* graduates and owners of Gigi's Restaurant in New Hyde Park. Talk about keeping things "in the family!"

We managed to attract two local legislators. One was Tony Avella, a New York City Council Member from Queens, where we launched our Whitestone class this year. Tony has been a strong supporter of *Aurora* and hopes to run for Mayor in 2008. Also appearing was newly elected State Senator Craig Johnson. His district includes our home turf in Nassau County and we look forward to his funding support.

The Color Guard was composed of students from three classes (we had eleven

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SUSTAINING THE CAUSE

The Institute gratefully thanks the following donors:

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

Steven M. Napolitano & Lisa Carcaterra

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

Italian American Chamber of Commerce – Midwest

Lago Inc. Restaurant & Cocktail Lounge

New York City (Councilmen Domenic Recchia & James Vacca)

New York State (Sen. Marty Golden)

New York State (Sen. Jeffrey Klein)

New York State (Sen. John Marchi)

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Supporters of the Institute (\$50 +)

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Friends of the Institute (\$25 +)

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Lucy F. Codella

Carmine D. Marinelli

Maria C. Poulos

Maria C. Poulos (In memory of Ria Balducci Murphy)

Marco S. Savona

Domenico F. Tancredi

YES! I share the values of the Italic Institute.

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

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AURORA, from p.1

classes this season) including the new Advanced Class in Nassau County. We hope to introduce an advanced class in some of the other counties this fall. That will give our students 24 lessons in the Italian heritage at little or no cost. This is the foundation of an “Italian School” tradition in the mold of six-year Greek and Hebrew schools. Only our Institute offers such a forward-thinking program. Happy 20th *Aurora*! ****

LE COSE PAZZE

Occasionally, the Italic Institute is criticized for having a “half-empty” attitude. While we would like to pump up everyone’s Italian ego there are just too many aches and pains to ignore. Here are a few:

- Presidential candidate/Congressman Tom Tancredo of Colorado wishes Italian American organizations would lay off a restaurant in his district that sells a “Wop Burger.” It seems “wop” is a cherished term among Italian Americans in Colorado. His constituents must consider Tancredo a first class wop. He is also a member of NIAF’s Italian American Caucus. Maybe he missed a crucial meeting!
- Connecticut Senator Louis DeLuca pleaded guilty to asking an Italian American trash hauler with mob ties to intimidate one of the senator’s relatives. Another politician promoting our negative image!
- HBO’s *The Sopranos* has been subsidizing the Irish-American Association in Kearny, NJ, to the tune of \$20,000 to hang an Italian flag on their building when the cameras roll. *The Sopranos* haven’t given Italian Americans a cent for hanging them out to dry for seven seasons.
- The Casa Italiana at NY University recently held a lecture by English author Carl Levy on *Italy and its Racisms*. Is this appropriate at such a venue? ****

BATAVIA UPDATE

Background: a faculty member at a public middle school in Batavia, IL, wrote, directed and coached 12-year-olds in a play loaded with Italian stereotypes including the mafia. Marina Levato, the mother of a student who refused to audition for a part, went to court to prevent the public performance. A federal judge refused her on the grounds of the 1st Amendment. Italic Institute Vice Chairman (Midwest) Don Fiore assembled a team of organizations to discuss alternative strategies. Legal action was deemed too costly. Attempts were made to attract media attraction without success. Marina decided to pull her son Johnny from the public school and various organizations subsidized his move with donations. Our Institute gave Marina and Johnny \$1,000 and an award for their courage.

Currently, Marina has a complaint filed with the U.S. Dept of Education. She is awaiting a decision. ****

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of Chicagoland. He emphasized the need to broaden the meaning of *italianita`* by going beyond the story of immigrants, sauce/gravy and family to classical Italy and the early pioneers of the Midwest such as explorer Enrico Tonti, one of the first Europeans to develop America in the 1600s.

But it was Gia's night to shine. Wearing several hats during the one-year production, she found herself fundraising as well as scriptwriting, networking as well as filming. Only a multi-talented individual could have accomplished such a feat.

As the Senior Producer and Fiscal Agent on the project, the Italic Institute opened the way for Gia's ModioMedia to accept tax-deductible grants from individuals, groups and even the State of Illinois. It was through our *Project Italia* Director Don Fiore that Gia found her first donor, Eugene Chesrow. As one of the project's largest donors, Mr. Chesrow's donation enabled Gia to hire invaluable research assistant Michelle Ferrell. Unfortunately, Don could not



(l - r) Dan Soles, VP of Programming PBS WTTW,
Larry Wert, Executive VP of NBC11, Bill Dal Cerro, VP Italic Institute

attend the Premiere Party as he was in Italy at the time. However, he has an appreciable presence in the film being interviewed about the historic welcome of Italo Balbo's air squadron in 1933.

And They Came to Chicago will soon be out in DVD format and join the Italic Institute's other film productions, *Roman Law in America* and *Italian American Visions* (the immigration), in documenting our invaluable legacy. ****

ON THE WAY TO...

the Forum Romanum, our globe-trotting Vice President Bill Dal Cerro chanced to meet the chairman of the American Institute of Roman Culture (AIRC), Darius Arya. Darius is of Iranian heritage but has an immense love for our ancestral civilization. When Bill informed him of the Institute's spiritual attachment to the Altar of Peace (*Ara Pacis Augustae*) a friendship was born. For Darius, it is a rare thing to meet Italian Americans who embrace Roman culture as does our Institute. We hope to establish a permanent relationship with the AIRC that will enhance our Classical connections.

VICE CHAIR MADE ITALIAN KNIGHT

If there were ever an award that was long overdue, it was knighthood for our Vice Chairman Don Fiore. Bestowed by the Italian Republic for exceptional work in sustaining the Italian heritage, the designation Cavaliere is Italy's way of recognizing the service of Italic people around the world.

Don Fiore's work in the metropolitan Chicago area has been characterized by his high degree of scholarship. Although not an academic, Don pursued Italic studies from the time he learned to read. Anyone familiar with the chaotic method of passing on the Italian heritage here in America knows that to be a scholar in Italic



Midwest Vice Chairman
Cavaliere Don Fiore

studies one must, by necessity, be self-taught. Don's research was transmitted to the community through his articles in various periodicals including *Fra Noi*, Chicago's premier Italian American monthly, and through the *Italic Way Magazine*, our own periodical. Along the way, Don marketed Italian gift products, plays the valve trombone regularly in *Caliendo's Banda Napoletana*, wages battles against defamation and has undertaken numerous projects for Italian American organizations and the Italian consulate. One of his unique areas of knowledge is the 1933 precision flight of Air Marshal Italo Balbo's 24 seaplanes from Italy to Chicago. Don has lectured dozens of time on the subject, keeping alive the wonder of one of aviation's most amazing feats. Today in the Chicago Loop, the event is memorialized by Balbo Drive and a Roman column along the lakefront sent by Premier Mussolini.

Don was born and raised in Chicago. He and wife Rene have two children and operate a real estate appraisal business. Don was attracted to the Italic Institute some fifteen years ago because we share his classical values. He has served as vice president, president and is now Vice Chairman, Midwest. His assigned program is *Project Italia* of which he is the Director. *Project Italia* includes video production, catalog sales and anti-defamation. Don is currently overseeing the *And They Came to Chicago* documentary just released for broadcast on PBS and local NBC. Don also has a cameo interview in the film discussing the Balbo flight.

To celebrate his new award, Don and Rene vacationed in Italy. *Eviva Donato!* ****

MIND POLLUTION

by John Mancini & Bill Dal Cerro

As our Italic heritage continues its descent into the abyss of mafia culture, the telltale effects can be discerned among our children. Each year I engage an Aurora class of 5th & 6th graders in an exchange about the media. Using an Aurora cartoon entitled *Struggle to Succeed*, the class is taken on a quick tour of Italian immigration that includes a panel on the Black Hand and the Mafia. When I recently questioned a class if they see bad Italians on television or in movies, many responded with *Shark Tale*, *The Godfather* and *The Sopranos*. As recently as last April *Shark Tale* was broadcast on ABC-TV during prime time on Saturday night. While *The Godfather* and its progeny have festered in the minds of adults for decades, we now see *Shark Tale* as kid's fare.



These youngsters celebrating Aurora's 20th year face a lifetime of ethnic stereotyping thanks to Italian Americans in the media. They must be prepared.

To Spielberg and his ilk this kiddie animation was only about sharks.

For a year we fought DreamWorks on *Shark Tale*, knowing full well that it crossed the age line with stereotypes. Apparently, our much-publicized concerns had no lingering effect on ABC-TV. But then again it had no effect on most Italian American politicians.

The same goes for middle school faculty that guides its young students into staging parodies of *The Sopranos* complete with all the usual guidomafia stereotypes. Such was done in Batavia, Illinois, with the blessing of

the Federal judge who called it a First Amendment right. The same goes for the cable station Nickelodeon that will soon produce a kids' movie based on the book *Nicky Deuce*, ghost-written for an illiterate *Sopranos* cast member, about a suburban Italian American pre-teen who happily dumbs himself down in a guido-goomba Brooklyn. Just the sort of inspiration our kids need.

Every year in his Current Events class in suburban Chicago, our own national vice president Bill Dal Cerro, a teacher, has his high school seniors make a list of attributes related to various American ethnic groups. The lists are conducted anonymously to encourage honesty. The top three descriptions of Italians last semester were "gangsters, pizza, and loud people." The top three descriptions this semester were "mafia, racists, and hairy." And this from school kids who score above-average on standardized tests!

Never once have we heard any public figure address the question of Italian American children's rights. It is as though our children are immune from outside stimuli. Are they doomed at birth to be guidos, guidettes, goombas or mafia hit men? All objections to our denigrating image are confined to adult concerns and summarily dismissed. Meanwhile the ramparts of our youth, our posterity, have been breached. This is the end result of our own apathy and collaboration. Many in our community have sold out their heritage but they have also debased it for generations to come. ****

RAFFLE WINNERS!

The winners of the drawing held at the 20th Anniversary Luncheon on April 21st at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Floral Park were:

- 1st Prize..(\$500)..Josephine Del Santo, New Hyde Park, NY
- 2nd Prize..(\$250)..Mr. & Mrs. George Galante-Cruz, Staten Island, NY
- 3rd Prize..(\$150)..Anthony Sacco, Bethel CT

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