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# The Officers' Log

## ZINNI: Warrior- Statesman

By Anthony Vecchione

When General Anthony Zinni U.S.M.C. (Ret.) walks into a room all attention gravitates towards him. The cliché “he lights up a room” would be right on target. That certainly was the case on Nov. 26 when Zinni addressed a standing-room-only crowd at Seton Hall University in



General Zinni received the Institute's Silver Medallion in 1996

South Orange, New Jersey.

The charismatic former Commander in Chief of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) engaged faculty and students for almost an hour during a lecture entitled: “The Battle for Peace: A Frontline Vision of America’s Power and Purpose,” also the title of his most recent book. The event was sponsored by The Joseph M. and Geraldine C. LaMotta Lecture Series and moderated by Professor William Connell, Ph.D., LaMotta Chair in Italian

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## FLAWED STRATEGY

### Ignoring Our Next Generation

Some months ago, I met with Long Island’s Nassau County Supervisor Tom Suozzi seeking his help in funding the *Aurora Heritage Program*. Among my requests was an introduction to a nationally known business executive who contributes to Suozzi’s campaign chest. Suozzi’s first response to me was why wasn’t the *Aurora Program* being funded by Italian American organizations?

How do you explain to a young, proud Italian American leader like Tom Suozzi, or for that matter any questioning soul, that there is no tradition in our community to educate children about their heritage? Most Greek American families send their children to after-school Greek programs for up to six years. Birthright Israel, since its founding in 2000, has sent 145,000 Jewish teens to Israel. Armenians, Ukrainians, Asians and a host of other proud ethnic groups make provision for acculturating their young. But not Italian Americans.

There is a big difference between giving a \$1,000 scholarship to study “Marketing” versus using that money to teach the history and language of the Italic people. For one thing, the gift of a two-week trip to Italy is worth more to our heritage than a \$3,000 check written to a college bursar. We have paid a heavy price for ignoring our children’s heritage. In effect, we have surrendered it to Francis Coppola, Martin Scorsese and others obsessed with the dark side of ethnicity. The natural progression of intermarriage and relocation has done the rest.

A recent study by our Institute reveals that less than 6% of the resources of the three major Italian American organizations is being spent on preserving the Italian heritage. That is only about \$774,000 of the \$14,000,000 they give away annually. In the meantime, the handful of cultural centers, museums, Italian concert bands, youth programs like Aurora, college chairs in Italian studies and community periodicals go begging for pennies to keep going. Instead, millions are given to medical charities, memorials, small scholarships and non-Italic programs. Worse, after fifty or so years of this largesse, our community has little to leave posterity except some statues and dwindling Little Italys. Even African Americans, once slaves, have a system of colleges with 50,000 attending students. The Irish and Scots have bagpipe bands in every American town and city. Meanwhile our Columbus Day parades have very little to show of our heritage except classic cars and bands imported from the homeland.

We need to wake up to reality. If our own organizations will not sustain our heritage and pass it on to our youth, who will? Please join us in calling for change and donating to our *Aurora Heritage Program*.

[By the way, Tom Suozzi did write to that famous businessman on our behalf. Neither he nor we received the courtesy of a response.]

## AURORA NEEDS SUPPORT

We are currently operating six classes in four Metro New York counties. Another Introductory class is scheduled to open in January, for a total of seven classes (140 youngsters). Because of a significant cut in legislative grants this year, four classes that operated last year could not be reopened.

This is the consequence of operating on public grants. Some Italian American legislators help us, some do not. In the Institute's home district, Nassau County, none of the Italian American legislators has helped us. Nevertheless, we are holding two classes in anticipation of membership support. One of these classes has been held for twenty years and we are committed to its survival. Please help us sustain these classes.



Our Advanced Class includes two family groups, seated, of four (left, the DiMontes) and three (the Chiaras).

## SUSTAINING THE CAUSE

The Institute gratefully thanks the following donors:

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The author with someone else's Ferrari

## OUR YEAR IN ITALY

By Bob Masullo

What is life in modern-day Italy like?

Well, my wife and I lived in the *bel paese* from June of 2005 to June of 2006 so I have an idea.

Before telling you what it is like, though, I would like to tell you what it is NOT like.

The Italy of today is nothing like people who lived in it decades ago remember it, including the grandparents of most contemporary Italian Americans.

It is not like the movies, either, which tend to paint it as a utopia or a cesspool. Neither saints, nor *mafiosi* account for significant parts of its population, nor do opera singers, organ grinders or donkey-cart drivers.

The Italy that I experienced for 12 months is a country very much like the Unites States; the only significant difference is language. Italians and Americans have virtually the same goals and aspirations. They live in equally nice homes, wear similar quality clothes, drive equivalent cars, watch too much television and have the same hopes for their children. In short, Italy has the conveniences and inconveniences of modern life. Like America, it is a consumer society with all the good and bad that implies.

Are there differences? Of course, each country is superior in certain things. Italy has more and/or better public transportation, food, wine, coffee, fashions, art, music, public gathering places, museums, interesting architecture and sexy-looking women. The United States has more and/or better spectator sports, barbecues, beaches, tall buildings, universities and household plumbing. Politically both countries are terrible. I was in Italy as Silvio Berlusconi campaigned for re-election as prime minister. One TV station (one of the few Berlusconi does not own) had a weekly program called, "Oh, no, Silvio." All it did was run clips from the previous seven days of the Italian "leader" doing or saying incredibly stupid things. It was quite similar to the regular David Letterman feature, "Great Moments in Presidential Speeches," which shows our own leader in action.

Berlusconi ran ads denouncing his opponent for being too cozy with socialists, tax raisers and homosexuals. Sound familiar?



## JAZZ BOOK COMING

(CHICAGO)—The first-ever book documenting the contributions of Italian American musicians to jazz is scheduled to be published in late Spring 2008. Written by the IIA's Vice President, Bill Dal Cerro, *Bebop, Swing and Bella Musica: The History of Italian Americans in Jazz* covers the influence which American musicians of Italian heritage have had on our nation's greatest musical art form, ranging from Dixieland jazz in turn-of-the-century New Orleans to the more modern fusion styles of today.

"It's been a labor of love," says Dal Cerro, a full-time English and Communications teacher in suburban Chicago. "My co-writer, Dave Witter, is also a teacher, and we both share a love of jazz and our Italian heritage. In fact, the book grew out of a 1998 article which Dave and I originally wrote for the Institute's *Italic Way* magazine."

Says Dal Cerro: "A quote we found by the late jazz critic Joachim Ernst-Berendt turned out to be prophetic: 'no other European country was the ancestral home of as many significant American jazz musicians than Italy.'"

The authors discovered that an amazing number of major jazz players, whom most people consider "American," were, in fact, of Italic background. They had Americanized their names due to prejudice or simply a desire to quickly assimilate. Among them were some genuine giants of jazz, people like Flip Phillips (Filippelli), Eddie Lang

(born Salvatore Massero), George Wallington (Giacinto Figlia), Louis Bellson (Balassoni), Joe Pass (Passalacqua), to name just a few. They also noticed that Italian American musicians were at the forefront of every major stylistic innovation in jazz, be it Big



Band (Joe Venuti), Experimental (Lennie Tristano), Bebop (Dodo Marmarosa) and Fusion (Al Di Meola). Such an influence continues to this day with players like saxophone master Joe Lovano.

In addition to featuring personal interviews and archival photos, *Bebop, Swing and Bella Musica: The History of Italian Americans in Jazz* offers interesting insights into both ethnic and American history. During jazz's early days, for example, Dal Cerro and Witter learned that a large Sicilian colony already existed in New Orleans before the French Opera House was built there in the 1880s, making it easy for the city fathers to recruit classical musicians. The sons of these classical musicians later went on to greatly influence Dixieland jazz. Similarly, Italian American players such as clarinetist Joe Marsala were instrumental in breaking down the color barrier in jazz by recruiting African American players during the Big Band era of the 1930s.

## SOMETHING ABOUT RUDY

By Rosario A. Iaconis

Where have you gone, Rudolph Giuliani? The politico currently campaigning for the Republican presidential nomination bears little resemblance to the feisty reformer I met almost two decades ago.

Though he'd served as a federal prosecutor in Ronald Reagan's Justice Department, Giuliani never expressed a fondness for the Gipper's states rights' beliefs. Nor did he slavishly subscribe to the supply-side nostrums of the Laffer curve. And throughout his entire career—before being anointed America's Mayor—Rudy advocated stringent national gun control laws. Plus, his stance on immigration was inclusive and benign.

But there's something about Rudy that is as troubling as his flip-flopping ethos. Giuliani was never a friend to the Italian American Community. His three marriages and estranged children and poor judgement are disconcerting. And instead of promoting his proud Italic roots in jurisprudence and governance, Rudy often resorts to dumbed-down don Corleone shtick whenever he needs a laugh line. Indeed, his open-ended advocacy for Israel and AIPAC far overshadows his commitment to Italy and Italian Americans. At the recent NIAF gala, Hizzoner promised nothing to the community and spent more time idolizing Yogi Berra than discussing Italian American issues.

Should Italian Americans vote for Rudy out of ethnic loyalty? Or should he be judged by his values, experience and platform? If Rudy runs as an American *sans* roots, his task may prove more onerous than expected.

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"I think people will be amazed by the facts and profiles in this book," says Dal Cerro. "It sheds a whole new light on a unique aspect of the Italian experience in America, namely our musical legacy from Italy."

For more info on *Bebop, Swing and Bella Musica: The History of Italian Americans in Jazz*, contact Bill Dal Cerro at [bdcerro@yahoo.com](mailto:bdcerro@yahoo.com).

## ZINNI, from p.1



Anthony Vecchione with Gen. Zinni

Studies.

Zinni, dubbed the “Warrior Statesman” by author Tom Clancy, borrowed heavily from his book, covering a wide range of geopolitical topics from the fall of the Soviet Union, to the impact of technology and globalization.

He shared his personal experiences in East Germany when

the Berlin Wall came down, as well as his tour of duty in Somalia. He gave insightful and no-holes-barred opinions on the current situation in the Middle East, where he once served as Special Envoy.

Zinni commented: “there is disorder in the world” and lamented about the unprecedented religious and ethnic hatred that exists. He spoke about the rise in “non-state, borderless entities” that he said make for dangerous and elusive enemies that pose a threat to stability in many volatile regions.

Zinni warned of the dangers of a bloated bureaucracy and a system of patronage that appoints people to jobs in the government in areas where they have no experience.

He said that the current turmoil in Iraq is riddled with “layers of complexity.” On the topic of U.S. power in the new world order, Zinni noted that Washington is isolated in its approach to the world and as it pursues a foreign policy driven by democratization, he warned that “democracy can’t come before stability.”

While he was generally optimistic about elements of the recent Annapolis Summit on the Middle East, he expressed some concerns particularly regarding the status of Jerusalem.

He concluded his lecture by saying that America has to do a better job of “listening,” and hearing the voices of others and learning more about their history and culture.

## YEAR IN ITALY, from p.2

Nothing like the high-minded campaign run for president of the United States in 2004. No, not much!

I was also in Italy during the time riots were unfolding in or near many large cities in France. We wondered if similar riots would take place in Italy. Italian friends said it was unlikely for several reasons:

- Italy has not done what France did, that is build ghetto-like apartments (that look much like city “projects” in New York) in rings around its cities for immigrants, thus isolating them. Immigrants in Italy are far more integrated into Italian society than immigrants in France are into French society.
- Italy did not give citizenship to residents of its former colonies, as France did.
- Percentage-wise there are far fewer Muslim immigrants (the big worry) in Italy than in France.

Still, Italians are quite concerned about immigrants, even non-Muslim ones. (Albanian immigrants, for example, account for many of the roadside prostitutes in Italy; others are responsible for much petty crime.) There is a feeling that Italy is becoming less Italian every day.

Also, some Muslim complaints about crucifixes in Italian public schools have irked Italians. The general reaction I heard is the same as that of many Americans to immigrants in the United States, namely “If they don’t like it here, let them go back where they came from.”

Italy, like all of western Europe, is now an importer of people rather than an exporter. So, many of the xenophobic sentiments that have been prevalent in the United States for decades are now being voiced by Italians, as well. The point is, for good or bad, Italy and the United States are remarkably similar.

My year-long stay made me proud of my (100 percent) Italian roots. Italy is a beautiful, wonderful country. But it also made me realize what I long ago realized about America. It’s not perfect.

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