



July, 2008  
No. 31

# The Officers' Log

## AURORA SINGS

Ten students from our Advanced Level *Aurora* class were invited to sing at the annual Jewish-Italian Breakfast in New Hyde Park Long Island on April 27<sup>th</sup>. They sang the *Aurora Class Song* and our rendition of the Julius LaRosa classic *Hey, Compare!* The ad hoc choral group was note-worthy for having two sets of triplets and one student who is half Italian, half Jewish. They did the Italians proud!



## BEYOND WISEGUYS

by  
Rosario A. Iaconis  
Vice Chairman East

Imagine a documentary that begins as a celebration of Hollywood's hidden Italian American geniuses and ends up perpetuating vile and hateful slurs. Ironically, the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) provided part of the financing for this travesty, and it is being promoted by one-trick goomba thespians and shallow pseudo-intellectuals.

"*Beyond Wiseguys: Italian Americans and the Movies*" is beyond the pale.

Indeed, Roseanne De Luca Braun's filmic attempt to dispel the  
*continued on p. 4*



## WHILE WE SLEPT

*The Italic Way Magazine* received a letter from David Freedberg, Director of Columbia University's Italian Academy, taking exception to our characterization of the Casa Italiana, of which it is a part, as "a dream gone awry."

Considering that the Casa was built and endowed in 1927 by Italian Americans at a cost in today's money of at least \$15 million and that there is nary an Italian American to be found on the staff or the Board of Guarantors, we stand by that characterization. In fact, the more we dig into the subject the more disappointed, and shocked, we feel.

In our opinion, the Italian government and Columbia University have managed to squeeze our community out of control of a major academic center, built with the sweat and treasure of a past generation of Americans. Clearly, many in our community have been asleep at the switch.

So what else is new?

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## PASSING THE BATON

You may remember a few years ago when a new Italian American group of attorneys in Illinois sued *The Sopranos* under the preamble of the Illinois Constitution. The group lost the case but made major headlines across the country for daring to take on HBO.

That organization, AIDA (American Italian Defense Association) and its Chairman Theodore Grippo, have thrown in their lot with our Institute. It was a difficult decision for Grippo, a prominent Chicago attorney now in retirement, to pass the baton to another organization. Nevertheless, he believes in what the Italic Institute stands for. He also values the strong relationships he has with our Chicago team Bill Dal Cerro, Don Fiore and Robert Allegrini. Ted is now ready to help expand our Midwest activities and membership. Institute chairman John Mancini proudly accepted the AIDA legacy and promised to integrate its legal expertise into our table of organization.

\*\*\*\*

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Enroll me as a member (\$25 check enclosed)

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

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**Italic Institute of America**

**PO Box 818**

**Floral Park, NY 11002**

**Tel: (516) 488-7400 Fax: (516) 488-4889**

**Email: ItalicOne@aol.com Website: Italic.org**

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**SUSTAINING THE CAUSE**

The Institute gratefully thanks the following donors:

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New York City (Councilmen Domenic Recchia & James Vacca)

New York State (Sen. Marty Golden)

New York State (Sen. Jeffrey Klein)

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Italian Cultural Society of Sacramento, Wm. Cerruti (Director)

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**AURORA PLANNED  
FOR CHICAGO**

Thanks to the indefatigable energy of Midwest member Frank DiPiero, an *Aurora* class is scheduled for the Fall of 2008 at the Maroons Soccer Club in Elmwood Park, IL, the first suburb west of Chicago.

At their June 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting, accountant Joe Marcheschi, a Maroons member and friend of Frank's, presented the idea to the club's governing board and it was unanimously approved. To top it off, Mr. Marcheschi became a new member of the IIA right on the spot!

Qualified teachers are already being interviewed. And, although *Aurora* is open to students of all backgrounds, Elmwood Park still has a sizeable Italian American presence, ensuring that Italic students from neighboring schools will be well-represented.

To support the new *Aurora* Heritage Program in Chicago, call Frank DiPiero at 773-307-7748.

**NYC GRANTS  
GETTING TOUGHER**

For the past ten years The Italic Institute has operated five of its *Aurora* Heritage classes with legislative grant money. These grants are called "member items" or "discretionary funds" and are distributed by local politicians to non-profit organizations in their districts. Despite the endless paperwork and certifications, some bad apples have mucked up the system: legislators who operate non-profits on the side, non-profits that are sham corporations or that do nothing. New York City newspapers have been reporting major scandals in the system.

Although our operation is tightly run we are burdened with ever-widening rules and procedures designed to eliminate corruption. The net result is more labor, greater complication and slower reimbursement. We have no choice but to deal with this system until the major Italian American organizations and our wealthy philanthropists recognize the value of heritage education and wean us from public funding.

**RAFFLE WINNERS**

Raffle tickets were drawn by *Aurora* students at the West Hempstead, Long Island, class on April 12th. The winners were:

1st Prize, \$500.....Frank Aguanno, Staten Island, NY

2nd Prize, \$250.....George Gaudio, Inverness, IL

3rd Prize, \$150.....S.J. Cocolicchio, Manhasset, NY

4th Prize, \$100.....Jean Gagliardo, Syosset, NY

Thanks to all who participated !

# ADVANCED PLACEMENT IN TROUBLE

When the Italian consulate in New York asked the Italic Institute, way back, which was more important, funding Italian language in American schools or funding pre-teen *Aurora* classes, we answered both were important but that *Aurora* was essential to create the demand for language in the schools. Well, as usual, we were ignored and the Italian government began pouring millions into American school systems subsidizing Italian classes and the Advanced Placement language test. *Aurora* received zero funding from Italy.

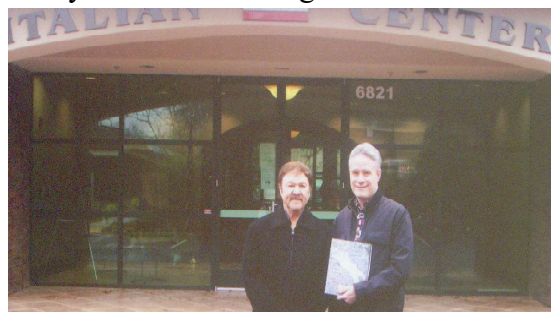
Today, both the subsidized Italian classes and the AP test are in trouble. In short, not enough Italian language students are taking the AP and American school districts are not willing to maintain Italian language classes without heavy Italian subsidies. The College Board has given Italy and the community a choice: come up with \$6 million to renew the AP test or it will be dropped by 2010.

Our position: Too much Italic money has been squandered on the American school system. Most of the Italian language students are probably not even of Italian stock. Invest the money in after-school heritage programs like *Aurora* and free trips to Italy that target Italian American children. Neither the Greeks nor the Jews have AP tests. The smart money is on after-school programs for their own children. And their children are a lot more connected to their heritage than ours.

# ADDENDA, *THE ITALIC WAY*

Our focus piece in the last magazine issue observed how little Italian American politicians do for our heritage compared to other ethnic groups. A recent article in the NY Times revealed that Congressman Anthony Weiner of Brooklyn has been generous with U.S. taxpayer money giving over \$800,000 in “earmarks” to Jewish groups in his district. One Orthodox group received \$450,000. Isn’t it commendable to give to your own without embarrassment? Weiner is paving his way to run for mayor of New York City.

We also wrote about individuals who build our community with little help from the major organizations. In Carmichael, CA (outside Sacramento) Bill and Patrizia Cerruti have spent 25 years leading the Italian Cultural Society, ultimately erecting a building with state grants that has now become a center for youth education and heritage preservation. Our community needs more heritage-builders and fewer gala-planners.



Bill Cerruti (left) and Bill Dal Cerro stand before the new Italian Cultural Center in Carmichael, CA.

## President Interviewed by National Educators Magazine

*President Bill Dal Cerro is a film, literature, and communications teacher in Chicago IL*

**You were a producer on a film about Italian-American immigrants called *And They Came to Chicago*. What did that entail?**

Establishing ties with the local PBS station, getting the filmmaker and historical research, tapping into business and history associates, generating publicity for the film.

**What stirred you to explore your roots?**

Alex Haley’s book, *Roots*.

**Who’s more damaging to Italian Americans—Tony Soprano or Vito Corleone?**

The characters aren’t a problem so much as what they represent: institutionalized caricatures. People subliminally accept the idea that Italian Americans are either crooks and/or low-class.

**Do you talk to your students about the damage of these stereotypes?**

I do a unit on gangster movies, which gives me the opportunity to examine such stereotypes, as well as organized crime in general.

**What do you consider the top two contributions of Italians to civilization?**

The Italian Renaissance and the birth of America. (Many of our Founding Fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson, loved Italy and read Roman writers.)

**What’s your next project?**

I’m writing a book about the history of Italians in jazz music, due out this summer.



## **Beyond Wiseguys**, from p.1

pejorative media stereotypes is as flawed as her choice of creative bedfellows.

And nowhere is this more evident than in Ms. Braun's decision to employ the likes of Fred Gardaphe and Joseph De Stefano as spokesmen for the Italo-American intelligentsia.

Chicago native Fred Gardaphe, a professor of Italian Studies, of all things, uses Braun's opus as a platform to laud *The Godfather*: "Don Corleone is the first gangster in American history—American film history—who is not a degenerate, not a sociopath." Gardaphe gushes that "we love him." And the benighted professor hails "the ability of the Italian culture to create different dimensions of the gangster."

George De Stefano, author of *An Offer We Can't Refuse*, finds *The Sopranos*' opening segment to be a "metaphor for Italian-American upward mobility over the decades."

Martin Scorsese, David Chase, Francis Ford Coppola, Paul Sorvino and Spike Lee have made themselves household names—and earned considerable sums of money—depicting the scions of Italy as gun-toting, cannoli-loving mobsters. In the process, these auteurs have managed to institutionalize Italophobia as America's most enduring prejudice. De Luca Braun even invited their participation in her lamentable project.

And now our so-called scholars are giving their imprimatur to such defamation.

Employing the chief purveyors of anti-Italian stereotypes in a documentary designed to upend stereotypes is both bizarre and self-defeating. Imagine Steven Spielberg enlisting Leni Riefenstahl and the authors of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" to pen and produce *Schindler's List*.

What, pray tell, was Ms. Braun thinking? And why would the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) contribute funds to a documentary that includes actors and directors steeped in misogyny, gratuitous violence and anti-Italian intolerance? \*\*\*\*

# **LOBBYING IN CALIFORNIA**

As a small but national organization we try to maintain a presence in each state. Some of our California members brought to our attention a movement to recognize Italian American contributions in school textbooks. If there is one state in this union that owes its soul to Italian American pioneers, it is California. So, we gladly wrote a letter of support to State Legislator Anthony J. Portantino (Pasadena) for his Assembly Bill 1863 – Italian American Curriculum. We will continue to help as we can to enrich the education of California students.

Unlike most other states where major Italian immigration came after other Europeans and Africans, California was settled nearly simultaneously by northern Italians and northern Europeans. If you count the Italian priests, soldiers and explorers who came with the Spaniards, we were among the first. Add to that the fishing industry, viticulture, and agriculture, all once dominated by Italian Americans, as well as the founding of the Bank of America in San Francisco, and you have a powerful force that has been totally ignored by the state education system. And of course, we mustn't forget that 10,000 Italian men women and children in and around San Francisco were forced out of their homes and livelihoods in 1942 by the U.S. government. \*\*\*\*

## **IN MEMORIAM**

We lost two members of the Institute earlier this year:

**Maria Poulos**, Mineola, NY, Maria donated often to the Institute in memory of her parents

**Charles Gabriele**, Venice, FL, Charles was a gifted composer of patriotic marches. He was associated with the U.S. Naval academy

# **CUBA & FORDHAM UNIVERSITY THINK ALIKE**

One of the first things Fidel Castro's brother Raul has done to entertain the Cuban people is to allow *The Sopranos* to be broadcast on state television. We suppose that Italian American gangsters will make the Communist Party look honest by comparison. There is also a memory of the Mafia running Cuban casinos during the Batista regime. Our legend lives!

*The Sopranos* also seems to inspire the Jesuits at Fordham University in the Bronx, New York. School officials allowed a symposium entitled "*The Sopranos: A Wake*" to be held on campus in June. Reverend McShane of Fordham later apologized to the Italian American Community by saying he knew it was going to be insulting to us but he let the function go forward quietly to avoid additional publicity. Well, there was enough news coverage of the event that we all heard about it. It is bad enough to have our own actors and filmmakers touting the Mafia. Now church educators want to join the parade.