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The Officers' Log

PROGRESS ON CRIME FAMILIES

The Institute gained a new ally in its initiative to end the use of the term “crime family” for Italian American gangsters. Long Island Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY) has signed on with a letter to U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder. Despite McCarthy’s support, the Attorney General’s office has not budged from its contention that the Dept. of Justice only uses the term “family” because, as Mr. Kevin L. Perkins, Assistant Director of the Criminal Investigative Division, writes: “*We are calling them what they choose to call themselves.*” One can only speculate if Mr. Perkins also refers to them as “men of honor.” Direct calls to Mr. Holder have not been returned.

“In this age of political correctness shouldn’t Italian Americans be respected by our government?” asks Bill Dal Cerro, Institute President. “What does it cost the American taxpayer for Mr. Holder to send a memo to the FBI Director to change the “Genovese crime family” to “gang” or “syndicate?”

Just this month, the *New York Times* carried a story of an “American-Israeli crime ring” that bilked the IRS out of some \$35 million in tax refunds. In one instance, a Mr.

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APPEAL TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

National President Bill Dal Cerro came to New York City this month to confer with New Jersey-based Vice President Anthony Vecchione and Institute Chairman John Mancini.

Among the topics discussed were the recent Council of Governors interest in mission statements. Specifically, how Italian American organizations are complying with their stated reason for existence. In fact, preserving the Italian heritage is quite low on the spending list of most organizations. That being the case, what is the proper way of dealing with it?

Both the Governors and the Officers

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“Closing ranks” on wayward mission statements
(l-r) Bill Dal Cerro, John Mancini, Tony Vecchione

AURORA PROGRAM FUNDED

Thanks to the generosity of long-time members Lisa Carcaterra and Steve Napolitano, we have the funds to reactivate our Nassau County classes this fall.

“Nassau County has been the heartland for *Aurora*,” asserts John Mancini, Program Director. “It’s where *Aurora* was born. Lisa and Steve rescued *Aurora*. Their faith in our mission of heritage has never wavered. We can’t thank them enough.”

While the Institute has dropped the program in other counties because of the loss of public grants, the Nassau classes will keep the core of the program alive for future expansion. Teacher training, student recruitment techniques and updating lesson plans require that the core program survive the ups and downs of the economy.

Mancini says he wants *Aurora* to adapt to the new realities. Public grants required the Institute to offer *Aurora* to all comers regardless of ethnic background. In some counties that meant 40% to 60% of the students had no Italian background. “With private grants we can now make *Aurora* an “Italian school” for kids with Italian roots,” explains Mancini. To make this point, Mancini plans to ask the Council of Governors to approve the use of the

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Crime Families, from p.1

Berkowitz "...arranged at least \$800,000 in tax refunds to be paid to, or for the benefit of eight or more members of his family, including two sons..." Now, if this is not a crime family what is? Yet, the Dept. of Justice uses the term "crime ring." Why are Italian American crooks given the cultural baggage of "family?"

"This initiative isn't over by a long shot." advises Institute Vice Chairman Rosario Iaconis. "If ever there were an issue favoring our side, this is it. Who will tell us the country cannot afford it? Who will say that replacing "gang" for "family" will jeopardize the work of law enforcement?"

The Italic Institute has been advocating, on and off, for this word change since 1991. Will this be the year that an African American president and attorney general will feel our pain? "If nothing else," says Chairman John Mancini, "we shall find out how much respect this administration has for the fifth largest ethnic group in America." *****

Attorney General, from p.1

recognize that our Institute has exhausted its appeals to the major organizations for support of its heritage programs. As a consequence, the Institute has filed a petition with New York State's Attorney General challenging the non-profit standing of one of these organizations.

Every non-profit organization is required to comply with the rules of the Charities Bureau of the AG's office. If the public contributes money to an organization whose stated purpose is to preserve the Italian cultural legacy but spends the bulk of the money for unrelated operations, the Charities Bureau may revoke their non-profit status.

The Institute leadership is closing ranks on this issue. Says Bill Dal Cerro, "For the good of the community we need to see if millions of dollars are being properly spent." *****

Aurora, from p.1

term "Italian Heritage Classes" in any description of Aurora.

As mentioned in the last *Log*, *Aurora* plans for this fall include a new module for teens who have completed the Introductory and Advanced levels. It will be called the Roman Academy, a description to convey its classical objective. "The new academy will be like an SAT prep course," suggests Mancini, "the kids will continue their Italian language study but they will be taught critical thinking and how to connect the dots of daily life with heritage." Additional funding is still coming in from Institute members to underwrite this module. *****

HENRY VINCI

Founder of Midwest's Certified Grocers

[Ed. Longtime member Steve Stauber of Chicago traces his Italian roots through his grandfather Henry Vinci. We profile Mr. Vinci to show how close we are all connected to the accomplishments that have built America.]



Italians have contributed to Chicago's vibrant economic growth for over 150 years. One of the greatest was Henry Vinci (photo left), the son of Italian immigrants from Sicily (father) and Genoa (mother), who was instrumental in the creation and oversight of Certified Grocers, which became one of the largest produce co-ops in the nation.

Born in 1898, Vinci had four brothers and one sister but was the first child to be born in America, explains his 90-year-old daughter, Virginia Stauber: "My grandfather, Salvatore, came to America from Cefalu' and had a fruit market. He worked hard to make enough money to bring the entire family over. And after they arrived, sometime later, my father Henry was born."

Nonno Vinci's work ethic is obviously what inspired son Henry to get into the grocery business, a market that was primarily dominated by Italians.

Vinci's earliest venture was at an open-air Farmer's Market on Clark and Ridge streets in Chicago's Edgewater neighborhood. Although successful, Vinci noted that he could be even more productive if he ran his market year round instead of following the other grocers' practice of selling only from Spring through Fall. Using a bank loan as well as money from friends, Vinci built a brick-building facility which also featured an on-site butcher shop.

In those days, however, even a moderately successful grocery store like Vinci's had a hard time competing with national chains like the A&P, whose buying power was enormous. So Vinci and a fellow grocer pursued the idea of forming a co-op with grocers from all over the city, allowing them to buy and sell produce at more competitive prices. This co-op soon blossomed into Certified Grocers, which eventually made Vinci its President and CEO.

"My father was honored as Man of the Year by the first Mayor Daley," says Virginia Stauber. "He gave many other local grocers their start, such as Dominick DeMatteo of Dominick's Food Stores. He was an amazing man." ****



One of some 250 Chinese restaurants in Rome, home of between 60,000 and 100,000 Chinese immigrants. Africans, Muslims, Asians, Romanians and Albanians have transformed the Italy of our ancestors.

INSALATA MISTA My Recent Journey to Italy

by Bill Dal Cerro, President

In 2004, I returned from a two-week visit to Italy and wrote a short article in the Log about the "changing face of Italy"—that is, the sudden appearance, almost overnight, of immigrants flooding *la bell'italia* for work opportunities. My main method of travel in Italy has always been via the train system, which is a great way to meet the local people. On that 2004 trip, however, I often found myself being the only person with an Italic surname (albeit from America) in the compartment. My seatmates were Arabic, African, Albanian, Romanian, Peruvian and Chinese. Granted, these newer citizens spoke some Italian; still, where had all the Italians gone?

As of 2009, the Italians are still there but so are even more immigrants, many of them encouraged to immigrate more freely to Italy with the reworking of the Schengen Treaty of 2006, which eased many border restrictions. The result is that Italy, once a largely homogenous nation, is fast becoming as multi-cultural as America, not only in the big cities but in the suburbs and small towns as well. The transition has not been smooth.

When I arrived in Rome for a two-week stay this past June, the local media was abuzz over the passage of stringent new immigration laws by the Berlusconi government, aimed at curbing a rash of street crimes. Notwithstanding the brutality of terrorist groups like the mafia in Sicily and the Camorra in Naples, Italy has historically been spared the kind of random street violence so much more common in America (rape, robbery, murder). The worst fear of any tourist was of being pick-pocketed by so-called gypsies on buses or in crowded piazzas. Not anymore.

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Italy, from p.3

The turning point came in October 2007 when Giovanna Regiani, the 47-year-old wife of a naval commander, was beaten and raped after leaving a Rome subway station. She later died from her injuries. Most recently, an elderly Dutch couple, visiting Rome on a Catholic pilgrimage, were also brutally attacked: the wife had her teeth knocked out after being hit in the face with a splintered piece of plywood. Romanian immigrants were identified and arrested in both cases. Indeed, the day before I left Rome, a group of young Moroccans had just been arrested for setting an entire row of Vespas on fire near Termini Station. No motive had been established.

Such cases have prodded Italian politicians to act, culminating in the recent series of laws allowing Italian police more freedom to spot-check immigrants or to arrest and deport anyone without legal status. Italian businesses that willingly hire illegal immigrants could also be fined.

As an American, I am obviously drawn by the comparison between Italy's dilemma and my own nation's current struggles with the immigration issue. I obviously cannot comment via the Italian perspective, other than to say that, as an outsider, many immigrants in Italy, like immigrants here, fluctuate between living as outsiders and/or making attempts to somewhat assimilate. The old saw about immigrants "doing jobs no (American or Italian) wants to do" isn't completely accurate, however: I went to more than one Italian café where the Chinese or Arabic owner served me espresso with a smile and a kind word in Italian. But it does beg the question: Does multi-culturalism help or harm a formerly homogenous country? We shall see. ****

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Regardless of their opinions about Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, almost all Italic people agree that forcing Italy to join the Axis was the Duce's worse mistake. That alliance and Italy's subsequent defeat has had a profound effect on our heritage. The Italic Institute is urging historians and academics to reopen the 1930s to unbiased scrutiny. Long Island's *Newsday* published Vice Chairman Rosario Iaconis' opinion on Hitler's "First Defeat," a well-documented event that has been set aside by popular myth. His article appeared on the 75th anniversary of the event.

When Mussolini challenged Hitler

BY ROSARIO A. IACONIS

Imagine a world where the Holocaust never happened. No Anschluss. No Auschwitz. No World War II.

Having challenged my Critical Thinking students at Briarcliffe College to ponder such a scenario, I reminded them of former President Bill Clinton's haunting query: "What if someone had listened to Winston Churchill and stood up to Adolf Hitler?"

Actually, the only man to thwart Hitler's plans for con-

quest before 1942 was, quite improbably, Benito Mussolini. Today marks the 75th anniversary of Adolf Hitler's first defeat — at the hands of a fellow dictator.

As an Italian-American activist, I've been the target of critics who expect me to "explain away" the reign of il Duce. First of all, I am neither a revisionist nor an apologist for the founder of fascism.

In truth, il Duce and Adolf Hitler were not always political bedfellows. When the two first met in Venice in June of 1934, Mussolini excoriated Hitler for coveting Austria.

The Italian premier considered Hitler "quite mad" and found the Nazi doctrine of a master race to be non-

sense. He openly repudiated Germany's virulent anti-Semitism. Unaware of the Magic Boot's secular tradition of philo-Semitism, my students were astounded by Mussolini's defiant attitude toward his future German ally.

Indeed, not one Jew under fascist Italy's governance was ever delivered to the Germans — until the Nazi occupation in 1943. And despite the racial laws of 1938, Mussolini even sent the Italian military into harm's way to protect Jewish lives.

In a speech following their initial meeting, il Duce humiliated Hitler by insisting that Germany join Italy in respecting Austria's sovereignty. But

on July 25, 1934, Hitler struck back and had Engelbert Dollfuss, the Austrian chancellor, assassinated as part of a coup to annex the land of his birth.

More than 100 people were killed, and more than 200 suffered serious injuries. Enraged, Mussolini dispatched 75,000 Italian troops to the Brenner Pass. Hitler backed down and ceased all Nazi depredations in Austria.

The following April, Mussolini convened a summit of the three major European victors of World War I — Britain, France and Italy — at Stresa, to forge a united front against German rearmament and expansionism. But Britain rejected such sol-

idity, signing the Anglo-German Naval Agreement two months later.

Had the Stresa Front held, the Third Reich might have ended before it began.

A UJA-Federation of New York study in 2002 found that Long Island, New York City and Westchester are home to 55,000 Holocaust survivors. As we reflect on this missed rendezvous with history, imagine the world that might have been had the West followed Italy's lead and thwarted the Final Solution.

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Rosario A. Iaconis lives in Mineola.