



# The Officers' Log

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## CAMP ITALIA

Our *Aurora Heritage Program* never fired the imaginations of the major Italian American organizations and public grants dried up with the national economic crisis. Yet, the program has stirred some souls, including an *Aurora* teacher and the parent of one student. Together, teacher Donna Fontanetta and parent Maria Arianas launched a for-profit summer camp for three young age groups (*Bambini*, 4-5 year olds, *Ragazzi*, 8-10 year olds, and *Giovanotti* 11-13 year olds). Each age group is given instruction and activities for a total of 8 hours, divided over four days at a cost to parents of \$150 - \$210, varying if meals were served. Thirty-four youngsters enrolled in the fun-filled courses. To Donna and Maria: a job well done!

Programs such as this are available in different parts of the country. In Chicago, for example, the *Casa Italia* offers *Campo Estivo* (literally "Summer Camp") annually. It attracted 75 youngsters this summer. In Sacramento, the Italian Cultural Center offers year-round language programs. In Westchester County, New York, *Camp Carolina* and The Pope Center conduct language classes and a summer program for *bambini* and *ragazzi*. On



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## THE RIGHT TO RIDICULE



When Governor Chris Christie nixed a tax credit for MTV's *Jersey Shore*, Italian American activists cheered the news. The governor heartily dislikes the show's image of New Jersey and Italian Americans (he's Italic on his mother's side). He was also lobbied by some Italian American state legislators and Andre DiMino of the One Voice anti-defamation group.

But *The New York Times* weighed in with an editorial about how *Jersey Shore* has a Constitutional right to ridicule Italian American (see insert). That may be true, but does a sovereign state have to financially subsidize defamation? Our chairman Rosario Iaconis attempted to exercise his First Amendment right to question *The Times* but was rebuffed. So much for dialogue.

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## THINK TANK

At the threshold of our 25<sup>th</sup> year, the Italic Institute will be reshaping itself as an Italian American think tank. That is how the Council of Governors sees the future.

"It is clear that we have an entirely different perspective than other groups," says co-founder John Mancini. "We need to apply our classical expertise to a wide range of issues."

Just how would a think tank operate? How different will the Institute be?

Vice Chairman Don Fiore believes it is a logical evolution. "Just look at the projects we have undertaken over the years: video productions, youth education, anti-defamation, a serious heritage magazine, challenging the immigrant mindset. Who else has the knowledge and the willingness to rock boats?"

According to the governors, a think tank will strive to create a "Classical Italian" consensus both inside and outside the community. "The Italic people were key players in world history for over two millennia," offers Chairman Rosario Iaconis, "Today, the IIA holds forth on a myriad of issues: from global politics to macroeconomic policy to genetic engineering to space exploration-- not solely Italian American matters."

He went on to explain that the essence of our heritage is bound up in

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# IT'S YOUR MONEY

Many generous Italian Americans follow their hearts in donating to charitable causes. Be it to the Church and its numerous subgroups or to medical crusades or to Italian causes. Despite tales of the tight-fisted Italian American, our people can be counted on to donate hundreds of millions of dollars each year in passionate giving.

While they prefer “bricks & mortar” charities like hospitals, universities and religious institutions, they often forget that much of the donation can be eaten away by bureaucracy and waste. It is sad to read, for example that the Congregation of Holy Cross which controls Notre Dame University just settled a sexual abuse lawsuit in Canada for \$17 million, money that may not be covered by insurance but by savings and donations.

In the case of humanitarian causes like the Boys’ Town of Italy, donations support an organization that now brings to Italy orphans from Africa, eastern Europe and Asia who eventually settle in the land of our ancestors. Yet, the organization’s logo and image still reflect a vision of poor Italian waifs from war-torn Italy.

Or consider the groups that impress us with their huge galas and celebrity photo-ops. Between office overhead, salaries, travel expenses and publicity, they use up millions of dollars before one scholarship is awarded. Because their existence is tied to networking and selling dinner tickets and other fundraisers, they cannot rock any boats.

In contrast, the Italic Institute operates with volunteers, home offices and a wholly different attitude. We were founded to change the way people think. We are not afraid to speak our minds, the Classical Italian mind. We do rock boats.

If you feel generous, be assured that the Italic Institute is the best investment in your heritage. And we are tax deductible.

## Find the Deep End of the Pool

Do you know someone who is stuck in the shallow end of his/her heritage? Give him/her a membership in the Italic Institute!

### We are the Alternative!

\_\_\_\_ Enroll the person below as a member (\$50 check enclosed)

\_\_\_\_ Enclosed is a tax-deductible donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Italic Institute of America, PO Box 818, Floral Park, NY 11002

## Think Tank, from p. 1

pragmatism, reason and creativity. Unfortunately, Italian Americans are not fully using the gifts of their heritage. “Someone needs to remind them that thinking outside the box is part of our ancestral DNA,” explains Iaconis.

John Mancini suggests those “boxes” may include a woeful media image, our religious upbringing, our immigrant roots, and our degree of assimilation. “During the Middle Ages, Catholics launched the Crusades to gain access to Christian shrines,” he explained. “If you thought like an Italian, French or German Catholic, all you wanted was Bethlehem and Jerusalem. If you thought like a secular Italian you saw the potential for an enormous trade industry with the Muslim and Asian worlds, which eventually happened. We need to free the Italic mind. That is what a think tank does.”

“The ‘classical Italian’ encompasses the secular genius of Rome and the questioning mind of the Renaissance,” explained President Bill Dal Cerro, “Today, we are stuck in a short-sighted world of galas, charities and immigrant studies, confining ourselves to the expectations of other, more dominant, ethnic groups.”

As far as the shape of things to come, the Council expects that the *Aurora Heritage Program* will experiment with other methods of reaching pre-teens. *The Italic Way* and our newsletter will have added importance as vehicles of change. Readership must be expanded. Our assertive forays into the various segments of our community, as well as the mainstream media, will be increased. \*\*\*\*

## Camp Italia, from p. 1

Staten Island in New York City, the new *Casa Belvedere* and the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum both have modest language programs for children. There are, no doubt, other youth programs elsewhere in the country but not enough to produce all together the thousands of inspired Italian American kids that *Aurora* was aiming for.

Unlike these local programs, *Aurora* was designed to be multi-site and national. It was offered free of charge or for a minimum registration fee (\$50) — 60 hours of instruction and activities. Some 4,000 youngsters at 14 sites went through the program over 20 years. Local programs, on the other hand, must charge enough to pay overhead, which limits enrollment. *Aurora* looked for mass enrollment with the Italic Institute and its donors footing the bill — a gift to parents for bringing in their children.

The realities of our community are such that only local, fee-

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# ACADEMICS GONE WILD

You may recall that in 2004 our Institute co-produced a documentary for PBS entitled *And They Came to Chicago: An Italian American Legacy*. The video was shown on both Chicago PBS WTTW and local NBC-5 to excellent reviews. Recently, a DVD copy was reviewed by an Italian American periodical of the City University of New York. The review was done by a Jewish American professor who teaches African American Studies at Fordham University in the Bronx. The review started off well enough, complimenting the high quality of the production but lashed out at us for “sanitizing” Italian American history particularly in racial matters and omitting how Italian Americans owed much of their success to government programs. The reviewer, Prof. Mark Naison also offered bigoted filmmaker Spike Lee as a guide to the real (or reel?) Italian American experience.

Not only was the spirit of this criticism uncalled for, but the idea that a PBS documentary used to raise money from the Italian American community for PBS operation must include negative and groundless assertions stuck in our craw. We sent an open response to the editor of the periodical, Dr. Joseph Sciorra. If the name sounds familiar his sister Anabella Sciorra starred in some anti-Italic films by Spike Lee (*Jungle Fever*). Dr. Sciorra himself has often been absorbed in Italian “racism.” We questioned his odd choice of reviewers as self-serving and totally inappropriate for the type of documentary we produced.

This incident sheds light on the little-known activities in Italian American academia. It has become fashionable among some of our own scholars to demystify the image of the “good Italian.” Racial incidents like the murder of Josef Hawkins in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn (1989) and anti-Semitic episodes like the 1938 Racial Laws in Fascist Italy are becoming fodder for academics looking to promote themselves and an agenda. Sciorra is quite into racism while others like Prof. Stanislaw Pugliese, of Sephardic origin, specialize in the Jewish version of Italian history. In each case, the “good Italian” is reexamined and dissected.

The Italic Institute stands alone in engaging these academics. Few other organizations even know or understand the issues involved. Academics and the media arts are in their own worlds, but when they enter ours it is time to draw some lines.

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# THE REAL WORLD

Some people think Italian American activists look for trouble. That may be true for people who pay no attention to the world around them. Take for example the television show *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, a primetime series on NBC with endless reruns on many other channels. To launch its new season, *SVU* “fictionalized” last summer’s sex scandal of French



politician Dominique Strauss-Kahn. To make the story more “believable,” producer Dick Wolf replaced Strauss-Kahn with an Italian character played by Italian actor Franco Nero. Wolf managed to drag the fictitious but sleazy Italian into court on rape charges and get a conviction, something that did not happen with the actual Frenchman. When the Italic Institute’s objection was quoted in the *NY Daily News*, a spokesman for the show reassured everyone that it was all “fictional.” Maybe the show credits should include the disclaimer, “*No Frenchmen were injured in this program*,” just to put France at ease. (see the insert for a reprint of IIA’s comments)

In Chicago, the annual “Why honor a Fascist?” game was appropriately played out for the upteenth time on Balbo Drive near Soldier Field Stadium. Since 1933, a street on the south end of Lake Michigan has been named in honor of Italian aviator Italo Balbo for his monumental achievement in leading a squadron of 24 seaplanes across the Atlantic, both a technological and human



triumph. Opponents want to expunge the past. The Italic Institute organized the defense of Balbo led by Vice Chairman Don Fiore, an Italian aviation expert. Don drafted an online petition and President Bill Dal Cerro wrote a scholarly defense of Balbo’s record for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. (see insert) The

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**Real World**, from p. 3

opposition has lost interest...for this year.

Balbo may have been a Fascist, but in 1933 Italy was still our ally from the First World War and he was much admired by U.S. leaders and the majority of Americans. The Balbo feat should stand as an aviation milestone, not a political issue. \*\*\*\*

## MEMBERS ARE PUBLISHING

Historians mostly agree that Sacco & Vanzetti were railroaded to the electric chair by a biased judge and xenophobic America. But if you want to understand how some court paperwork did them in, you ought to read Italic Institute member Ted Grippo's new book *Malice Aforethought*. As a practicing attorney in Chicago for a few decades, now retired, Ted brings new insights to the notorious case. His research uncovered some legal skullduggery never revealed in other works on the subject. Ted's book is available through most internet sources like Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

Another Chicago member, Mike Bacarella wrote *Lincoln's Foreign Legion* about New York's famed Garibaldi Brigade.

In the works, for those who enjoy jazz, our president Bill Dal Cerro is finishing off his unique *Italians in Jazz* book. You might have seen an early preview of it in *The Italic Way* issues XXVI & XXVII. The Italian American contribution to jazz composition (eg., Dixieland) and performance are all covered, along with little-known stories of Italian- and African-American cooperation.

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**Camp Italia**, from p. 2

based after-school programs can survive. There is no money to create a national system of Italian heritage education like *Aurora*. Even the Italian government's limited IACE program charges upwards of \$300 per student. Consequently, the

student numbers have remained negligible. This is not the sort of system that will generate the numbers needed to sustain our classical heritage. But let us appreciate those folks who devote themselves to passing on our heritage work to kids.

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**Ridicule**, from p. 1

When the Italian American community fought against *The Sopranos* we were told that this defamation was a form of "art" because the fictional characters, although insulting, were "complex." Now we are told that the real life *cafoni* of *Jersey Shore* are the fruit of the U.S. Constitution and must be taxpayer supported. If the 1960s series *The Twilight Zone* ever returns we have just the plot for it.

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## MEDICI SEARCH

In 1975, in Washington D.C., businessman Jenò Paolucci of Chun-King fame gave a small group of Italian American politicians a donation of \$100,000. His only stipulation: create an organization that would a) get rid of negative media stereotypes of Italians and b) get more Italian Americans involved in politics. Their response was to create the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF), which has become a national charitable group with a budget of around \$3 million dollars.

Has the NIAF achieved its goals? Regarding (A), the media image of Italians over the decades has actually gotten worse, not better; indeed, three actors previously honored by the NIAF—Robert De Niro, John Travolta, and Al Pacino—are currently shooting separate mob

movies.

And as for (B), there appears to be only one isolated example in which American politicians of Italian descent used their political influence to specifically advance an ethnic agenda: the 1999 U.S. Congressional hearings on the harassment and internment of Italians during World War II (*Una Storia Segreta*), a bipartisan effort co-chaired by Congressmen Rick Lazio (R-NY) and Eliot Engel (D-NY, Jewish on his father's side, Italian on his mother's).

The point is that visionary business leaders like Jenò Paolucci have become practically extinct. Once upon a time, during *Il Rinascimento*, wealthy families like the Medici regularly gave their millions to artists and thinkers whose sole mission in life was to promote Italic culture.

In America, that spirit has disappeared. Instead, in a perverse desire to assimilate and be accepted as "good Americans," people with Italian surnames divert their monies to non-ethnic specific charities. This is not the case with Jewish Americans, Greek Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans—you name the group. Their wealthy folk promote their respective cultures *first*. If there is any money leftover—and there usually is—it is that money which is then distributed to various non-ethnic-related charities (hospitals, orphanages, colleges, churches, etc.) As the old saying goes: "Charity begins at home."

Although our institute humbly and gratefully appreciates whatever we receive from our membership, the simple, cruel fact is that the funding sources to support an organization like ours are quickly drying up. Budget cuts nationwide have depleted monetary sources such as educational foundations and matching grants. Unless the IIA finds its own Lorenzo the Magnificent in 2012, we may remain merely a small voice crying out in the wilderness. We cannot let our classical Roman legacy just fade away.

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