



UPDATE

Italic Institute of America
“Italian Pride on a Classical Foundation”
September, 2023 www.italic.org



Our Special Niche

by John Mancini, Executive Director



Now and then I am contacted by well-meaning people to join forces with new umbrella organizations being formed with younger leadership. These groups want to hold revolutionary national conferences, make Hollywood movies, and transform the “community.” Sadly, my jaded response is “*Been there, done that.*”

Anyone who has participated in Italian American organizations knows how frustrating such ambitious dreams are. Eventually, every organization settles back into throwing galas and awarding scholarships. A few launch magazines and newsletters with very limited circulations.

Frankly, the Italic Institute never set the world on fire despite going through all the stages of ambition: national membership, black-tie galas, Saturday youth programs, video productions, and a magazine. Great while they lasted, but Italos are a tough market!

Yet, like the miracle of compound interest, all our work over 36 years was never wasted. The research our analysts did and the articles and books that resulted now fill our online Research Library. Our team still manages to get opinions published in mainstream media (see p. 2). In short, we are a valuable player in the community and at large.

We’re an arsenal of education. Thousands of our Columbus Day defense brochures have gone to groups around the country. Our weekly blogs are mini-cultural lessons free for the taking.

We have found our niche!

The Sea Beckons

The Italian Navy’s training ship *Amerigo Vespucci* just began a world cruise to help market Italian products and design.

You may have seen it in New York Harbor for Op-Sail in 1976, one of two Atlantic crossings.

Built at Stabia on the Bay of Naples in 1931, it was the sister ship to the *Cristoforo Colombo*. These steel-hulled tall ships, in turn, were modeled on a famous 19th Century 84-gun Sicilian warship. (Italy’s maritime credentials weren’t just held by Venice and Genoa!)

The *Vespucci* and *Colombo* survived the Second World War, but the USSR took the *Colombo* as war booty (re-named *Danube*). The ship served with its Black Sea fleet and was scrapped in 1971.

Since 1964, the Italians have continually upgraded *Vespucci*’s mechanics and technology. Without its 28,360 square feet of sails, it can motor over 5,000 miles at 10-knots. This *nave scuola* is staffed by a crew of 470.



With his new job at the Vatican, things were looking up.

“Play it Again, Frank!”

Items for these *Updates* often come from associates who helped to build our Institute over the years. Frank Cardone of Yonkers, NY. is one of those friends who brought sound to our prose. For much of his life, Frank was involved with traditional Italian bands. At one point, he became the manager of a Yonkers concert band, the kind that fill auditoriums with nostalgic Italian Americans. (cont'd on p.3)

The Media Know Us

It isn't easy to access mainstream newspapers. Besides receiving hundreds of letters, editors may judge anything concerning Italian American issues as low priority.

Our Institute is staffed by many "wordsmiths" who monitor a wide range of news media – print and broadcast. Most other organizations know the futility of letterwriting, leaving that challenge to the Italic Institute, namely to Bill Dal Cerro and Rosario Iaconis.

Here are two letters published in bigtime news since our last *Update*. No room to show you our suburban hits. The subjects vary, as you can see. But our points are expressed well.



Bill Dal Cerro



Rosario Iaconis

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

Bank of America's misconduct goes against everything its founder stood for

Recent stories about the Bank of America over-charging customers — once again — reminded me that the bank's founder, A.P. Giannini, must be rolling over in his grave. Such things taint his legacy.

Amadeo Pietro Giannini was born in San Jose, California in 1870 to Italian immigrant parents from Genoa. To put it simply: Giannini did for banking what Andrew Carnegie did for steel, John Rockefeller did for oil and Cornelius Vanderbilt did for shipping and the railroads.

Unlike many of America's business titans, however, Giannini was

a paragon of ethics and excellence. One of his most famous quotes relates this: "A man never owns a fortune; a fortune owns him."

True to his word, Giannini spent his entire career either giving money away (he only had \$400,000 in his account after he died in 1949), subsidizing struggling immigrants, or giving loans to people and projects which we all know today, among them the Golden Gate Bridge, early Hollywood, Walt Disney, California wineries and Hewlett-Packard.

Giannini's proudest accomplishment? Branch banking, which brought banking services to common people in their neighborhoods. That's why stories about how Bank of America has drifted away from its original concerns for good customer service are so sad and hurtful.

Americans not only tend to forget their history. They also forget historical figures whose good names should still serve as inspirations, even in 2023.

A.P. Giannini was one of those noble figures.

Bill Dal Cerro, Italic Institute of America, Chicago

July 14, 2023



WALL STREET JOURNAL



March 18, 2023

Ms. Noonan correctly describes Mr. DeSantis as a political heavyweight whose prospective presidential candidacy "packed a punch." Mr. Trump, however, is resorting to churlish stereotypes in the hopes of derailing the Florida governor's bid to become our first Italian-American president. Rather than challenge Mr. DeSantis in the realm of ideas, Mr. Trump calls the governor "Meatball Ron."

NBC commentator and historian Michael Beschloss, in erroneously linking Mr. DeSantis with a state senator's bill requiring political bloggers to register with the state, labeled the governor a "local Mussolini." Though he is an avowed opponent of radical wokeness, Mr. DeSantis is no latter-day *Duce*. Mr. Beschloss's descent into ethnic derision is as vile as it is unwarranted.

ROSARIO A. IACONIS

Chairman, Italic Institute of America

Don't Keep Us Secret!

Tell your friends and relatives the best kept secret in the Italian American community.

We have the only Italian American website with a Research Library, a Video Gallery, an Italian Jukebox, educational publications, and an interactive blog platform.

Italic Institute of America
PO Box 818
Floral Park, NY 11002
www.italic.org

Donations are Tax Deductible

(...Frank (from p.1)



Gov. Pataki's fundraiser was held at the Egyptian, not Roman, Exhibit Room!

We brought Frank's band to Mahattan and sponsored two concerts for our members. We also added a selection of Italian patriotic marches.

A measure of our success occurred when NY Governor George Pataki hired our "Manhattan" band for a campaign fundraiser at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2002.



Frank (right, in 2002) reports that the band went silent during Covid but has now returned as the 16-piece Yonkers Military Band, doing parades around the region. *Marciare avanti!*

Isetta Redux

You may remember that tiny, odd-looking car from the 1950s with a front door. It was an Italian inspiration called the *Isetta* that saved Germany's BMW from bankruptcy. We did an *Italic Way* story on it in 1995 (issue XXIV). Interestingly, this "bubble car" has been reborn as the *Microlino EV*, an electric vehicle built in Italy for a Swiss carmaker. It's half the size of a *Smart EV*, with a

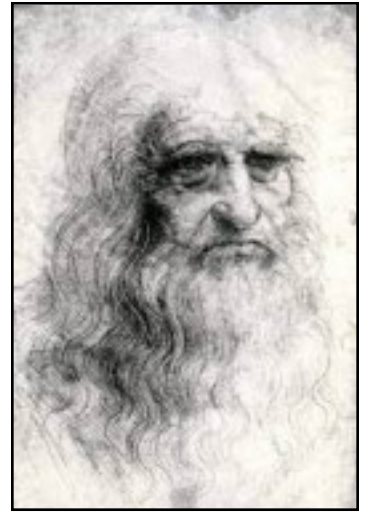


range of only between 50 to 120 miles. With a top speed of 56 mph, it's clearly designed for city driving. And don't look for an airbag, a door handle or rearview mirror. Plus, the transmission has no Park position so you need to use the hand brake when not driving. Prices start at \$16,000. Not as cheap as you'd expect.

Leonardo da Asia?

Did you know that Leonardo's mother is a historic mystery? He was born out of wedlock to a 15-year-old peasant girl named Caterina. His father was a notary from a distinguished family. One of the documents Leonardo's father witnessed was the manumission of a slave girl named Caterina. This last fact is a recent rev-

elation uncovered by scholar Carlo Vecce. Was this Caterina Leonardo's mother? Vecce believes so. His further research revealed that a number of Caterinas were freed from bondage around that time. The frequency of the name is explained as the custom of renaming foreign slave girls the same. A similar custom was used in Naples to name abandoned children "esposito" (exposed).



However, the name Caterina, from the Greek word *katharos* ('pure'), became popular among Italian families during the Renaissance, as in noblewoman Catherine DeMedici. The Caterina that Vecce found was a slave from Central Asia. But Italy was already awash in Caterinas! If it was the slave girl, Leonardo would be only half-Italian. Above is his self-portrait; you judge.

Mega Stars

The Mario & Luigi franchise is worth from \$25 Billion to \$2 trillion, depending on the source. The recent *Super Mario Bros. Movie* raked in \$400 million so far.

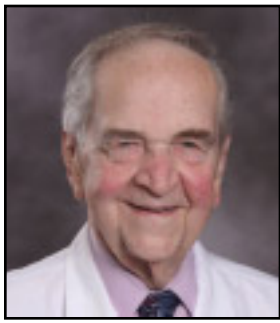


Nintendo game designer Shigeru Miyamoto (right) credited his landlord Mario Segale for inspiring the character. Segale was leasing Nintendo office space near Seattle when the company missed some rent payments. The multi-millionaire landlord was a hands-on guy who often ditched his suit for workclothes and suspenders (see below). He handled tenants in arrears personally, one day confronting Miyamoto and obviously making quite an impression.



Miyamoto admitted the Mario connection later on, but Segale didn't mind or sue the franchise. Before he died in 2018 at age 84, Segale joked, "You might say I'm still waiting for my royalty checks."

Noteworthy in Passing



Michael Brescia, M.D., 90, was a saint wrapped in a lab coat.

In the 1960s, he and Dr. James Cimino invented a way to join an artery with a vein to make dialysis quicker and less painful – it's the standard still used today, saving countless lives.

Born to poor but hardworking Italian parents in the Bronx, NY, Brescia did poorly in school until his teachers realized that it was because of his high IQ. His father suggested plumbing but young "Mickey" often saw a well-heeled doctor making his rounds and opted for medicine. Veins and arteries could be like "plumbing."

He and Cimino could have become rich with their dialysis invention, but chose to share it to save lives.

Financial wiz **Angelo Mozilo**, 84, thought he was helping first-time homebuyers when he launched Countrywide Financial mortgage lenders. What he actually did was create a huge "sub-prime" mortgage boondoggle that contributed to the 2008 housing collapse. He was the face of the collapse but not the fall guy. He managed to unload Countrywide to Bank of America before the collapse, pocketing millions while the bank lost billions. He had enough socked away to pay the SEC a \$67.5 million settlement. Note: Angelo's father wanted him to be a butcher!



A Meeting of the Minds

It isn't often that Institute officers and associates get together. But on the occasion of the wedding of Rosario Iaconis's daughter Evelina last April, three of them joined the festivities.



John Mancini, dad Rosario, Tony Vecchione

It was very much an Italian American wedding – both sides with roots in the Boot – in cuisine and music.

Learn While You Eat!

Our Chicago associate Frank Di Piero keeps sending us photos of groups and businesses that have helped distribute our *Inventions of Italy* placemat across and around Chicagoland.



Frank has been so successful that it might be easier to picture the people that have NOT received this unique placemat.



Conte di Savoia gourmet grocery

These are just a few of the groups and businesses that have embraced our Placemat for distribution to their members and customers.



Maria SS Laetana Society

If you would like to donate placemats to an Italian language class or business, just let us know how many...no charge.



Society of San Francisco di Paola

Learning Italian history doesn't have to be from books. Our Placemat can feed your mind while you eat.



A Must Read

If you have an interest in World War II and can't find an unbiased account of Italy's participation, here's what you need: a summary compiled by our Institute researchers, culled from hundreds of sources over years. (See the enclosed order form.)

