



UPDATE

Italic Institute of America

“Italian Pride on a Classical Foundation”

February, 2026

www.italic.org



Glitz Only Goes So Far

by John Mancini, Executive Director



We have come to a point where Italian American activists are using all means available to keep our heritage alive and well. Podcasts, videos, publications, galas, conferences, museums, clubs, scholarships, parades, and everything in between. But how to measure the results?

Most organizations claim success by virtue of membership rolls or photo-ops with rich people and Italian diplomats. One major group touts special relationships with Italy’s government, its regions, and its corporations. It even proclaims special membership in the United Nations. Another group stages galas sponsored by the old House of Savoy where capes and royal medals adorn tuxedos. In short, there’s a whole segment of our community awash in glamour and high-rollers.

All this glitz, all of these glorious relationships haven’t moved the needle on our media image. Nor have they awakened our younger generations.

Our community once built and ran the most prestigious cultural center in America at Columbia U., but only the Italic Institute fought to save it from going “European.” Glitz didn’t lend a hand, so we lost it.

As I write, the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum on Staten Island, NY—the gem of our history—badly needs financial support. Will glitz come to its rescue?

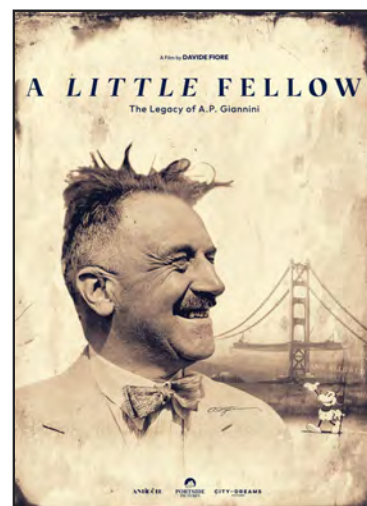
Will glitz ever support the dedicated men and women who operate cultural centers, local museums, and language programs around the country but receive little or nothing from on high?

We can only wish!

FINALLY!

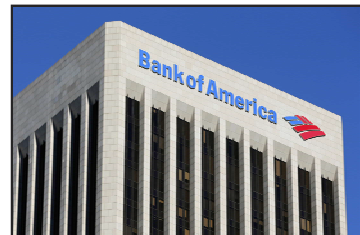
Last year, a Mexican filmmaker made a movie about the remarkable Mother Cabrini. It was a long time coming.

This year, an Italian made a film about Amadeo Giannini, the American banking genius who created branch banking and financed Walt Disney.



The documentary is titled *A Little Fellow: The Legacy of A.P. Giannini*. A bit misleading, as the title refers to the average American who benefitted from Giannini’s innovations, not the banker himself who stood six-feet. What’s important is that our community now has at least two professional films to document some of the many contributions of Italian Americans.

The problem is how to find the film? *YouTube* has the 2-minute trailer, but like



Cabrini, you would have to

license a viewing from Collective Eye Films, an agent for educational documentaries. We just bought a copy for \$200.

Such is the problem with positive image films. They are not box office hits out of Hollywood. Yet, credit must go to filmmakers like Davide Fiore, an Italian from Torino who was passionate enough to make this film and persistent enough to finance it through the internet. He is now based in Los Angeles, clearly not living on the “profits” of *A Little Fellow*.



“Ok, ok, what about this one? There was an Irishman, an Italian and an Englishman ..”

CartoonStock.com

The Ultimate Sacrifice

An overwhelming number of Boomers have photos of a parent in uniform from World War II. Termed the Greatest Generation, most survived the wartime ordeal to enjoy the postwar life and raise families.

Americans of Italian origin served in huge numbers, some estimates have us as the largest ethnic group in uniform. Some twenty of our brethren earned the Congressional medal of Honor. And many more did not come home alive.



Our Andrew Ricci with great uncle Pat and his late mother Janice, bearer of the Aceto line.

In our April, 2024 *Update* we told the story of Lt. Pasquale “Pat” Aceto (inset) who died of wounds during the liberation of the Philippines in 1944. Lt. Aceto was the

great uncle of Andrew Ricci, an attorney and our part-time Design Editor.

After months of correspondence with the U.S. Army Awards and Decorations Unit, we were able to restore this hero’s missing military decorations. Lt. Aceto’s story and decorations will now be a family heirloom.



Grave Located

The Camelio Family of Massachusetts had a mission during a European vacation, to find the gravesite of an uncle killed in the European Theater on February 28, 1945. That was U.S. Army Private First Class Mario Camelio (left).

Steven Camelio and family found the marker in a Belgian cemetery.

PFC. Camelio’s name lives on in Steven’s brother Mario of New Hampshire. Born ten years later on the same day of his uncle’s death, Mario’s parents took it as a sign to change his intended name to honor his uncle’s.



(l-r, Steven, wife Mary, son Nick with fiancée Ashley)

[Note: the Camelios are cousins of Exec. Director John Mancini.]

Come Va l’Italia?

The land of our ancestors is doing just fine. Under the leadership of the center-right government of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Italians are enjoying one of the longest running administrations (3 years) since Italy became a republic in 1946.



Its economy ranks 8th in the world, ahead of Russia and Canada. But its debt is 137% of economic output (the U.S. is at 125%).

Italians pay more than twice as much as us for home energy, and gasoline is almost \$7 a gallon.

Italy has what people want: luxury items of every kind, technology in every field, and lots of special foods. It even builds warships for our Navy. Closer to home, the Trump Administration just slashed the tariffs on those high-end Italian pastas (*Rummo, Garofalo, La Molisana*) after some serious Italian pushback.

To meet the new NATO requirement to allocate 5% of its budget to defense, Italy has cleverly added the



perennial dream of a bridge connecting Sicily with the mainland as a “military” expenditure—the strategic movement of troops and supplies being the rationale. At an estimated cost of \$15 billion it would be the longest suspension bridge in the world. For now, the project is awaiting clearance from Italy’s high court to proceed.

Our once impoverished homeland boasts the third highest gold reserves in the world (2,452 tons or \$340 billion), behind the U.S. and Germany. Recently, PM Meloni’s *Fratelli d’Italia* Party wants the treasure designated as belonging to the “Italian people” rather than to the state. What their reasoning is has even international bankers wondering. In the meantime, Italians shouldn’t expect to divvy up the hoard anytime soon.

Sadly, of the 46 teams to compete in the Soccer World Cup this year, Italy is not one. A nation devoted to the sport has failed for the first time to field a winning team. In the past, Italy was the first team to win consecutive titles in 1934 & 1938, then again in 1982 and 2006 (right). It was the first to have reached the finals six times in total. This year must be a real gut-punch.



Sic Transit Gloria Italica



Jazz great **Chuck Mangione**, 84, achieved international success in 1978 with his jazz-pop single *Feels So Good*, deemed by one critic the most recognized tune since *Michelle* by the Beatles. He released more than 30 albums, beginning in the 1960s. His compositions were used at the Olympics in 1976, 1978, and 1980. Mangione did side gigs as an actor on TV's *Magnum, P.I.* and the animated television series *King of the Hill*.

Connie Francis, 87, was born Concetta Franconero. Her singing career spanned decades beginning with her 1957 rock version of *Who's Sorry Now?* She was the first woman to reach No. 1 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 chart with *Everybody's Somebody's Fool* in 1960. She was also the first woman to achieve three No. 1 hits on the chart, among her 53 career entries.

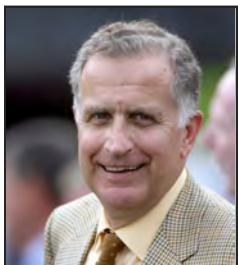


Lou Christie, 82, was born Lugee (sic) Sacco. His first hit song *The Gypsy Cried* debuted his falsetto style. It was his agent Nick Cenci who Anglicized his name and encouraged the falsetto, patterned on Frankie Valli. Christie also co-authored his songs and stayed active with live appearances;



joining the Oldies circuit and singing falsetto into his 70s.

Claudia Cardinale, 87, was among the bevy of Italian beauties who populated post-war movies. Born in French Tunisia to Sicilian parents, she spoke only French and Sicilian dialect when young. Her early Italian movies had to be dubbed because of her French accent and husky voice from smoking two packs of cigarettes daily.

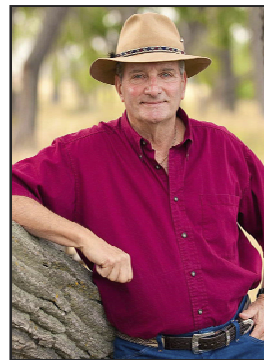
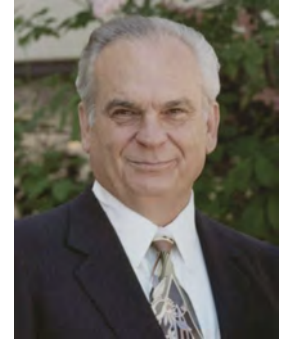


Paul Tagliabue, 84, was the commissioner of the National Football League for 17 years. A lawyer by trade, he took some strong stands like banning the Superbowl in Arizona when that state refused to recognize Martin Luther King Day as a national holiday.



Dr. Joseph Giordano, 84, is credited with saving the life of President Ronald Reagan in 1981 after an attempted assassination. A surgeon by training, Giordano had also created the Trauma Center that was prepared for such emergencies. The severely weakened Reagan jokingly asked if he was a Democrat, Giordano replied, "Today, Mr. President, we are all Republicans."

James Leprino, 87, was called "America's Mozzarella King" as the world's largest producer of that cheese. Leprino Foods still provides the topping for Domino's, Pizza Hut, Little Caesar, Papa Johns, and most frozen pizza makers. What started as a side business for his father now employs 5,500 workers and 18 factories. Utilizing the leftover whey, the company now supplies lactose and protein powders for baby formula around the world.



Sam Sebastiani, 84 was not only a storied Sonoma, CA, wine-maker but a conservationist. His father planted the vines and produced sacramental/medicinal wines during Prohibition. When Sam took over in 1967 he expanded into moderate priced and varietal wines, eventually selling the business for \$31 million in 2005. Some of the money went into preserving wetlands earning him an EPA award.

Giorgio Armani, 91, Italian fashionista and founder of the Armani luxury brands that include cosmetics, perfumes and costume design for over 100 films. Armani ventured into hotels and sports, designing uniforms for Olympic and professional sports teams. Socially, he encouraged the banning of underweight models.



Theodore Grippo, 96, was an attorney and early associate of the Italic Institute. He famously sued (unsuccessfully) HBO over *The Sopranos*, as a violation of the "Dignity Clause" in the Illinois state constitution. Later he wrote the book *With Malice Aforethought* exposing the errors in the infamous Sacco and Vanzetti trial.

A Message to the Media

Monday, October 13, 2025 | The Hardest-Working Paper in America | 74°/59° Forecast, Page 29

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES



Italian American stereotypes are damaging

The selection of actor Chazz Palminteri as a grand marshal in this year's annual Columbus Day Parade is a sobering reflection of how the Italian American media image has deteriorated over the decades.

Consider the following comparison.

In the 1960s, Frankie Avalon was so popular that he starred in a series of hokey, yet very successful, beach party movies. Frankie was seen as the quintessential "all-

American" teenager: wholesome, attractive and likable.

But in 1972, Francis Ford Coppola turned a trashy 1969 novel by Mario Puzo into one of the first blockbuster movies of the decade: "The Godfather." It featured a leading (and fictionalized) character, Don Vito Corleone, who could pass for any regular, soft-spoken, Italian *nonno* — grandfather — except this *nonno* was the epitome of evil.

In contrast to Frankie, Don Vito represented not the all-American dream but the all-American nightmare.

The popularity of this dark image in American culture has fossilized into what we have today: The image of the Italian American male as an illiterate, violent mobster, either dramatic or comical. Palminteri's career demonstrates how Hollywood has unfairly knee-capped actors like him when it comes to the diversity of the Italian American media image.

Palminteri has played both violent gangsters — in "A Bronx Tale" and "Legend" — and comical ones in "Analyze This," "Bullets Over Broadway" and "Oscar."

This stereotype eventually moved to cable TV in the late 1990s with "The Sopranos," featuring the late James Gandolfini as, once again, a fictionalized Italian American dad whom you would not want to have as your neighbor.

Those who dismiss the power of such a stereotype, recall former President Bill Clinton being overheard on a taped phone conversation in the early 1990s. He referred to the eloquent New York Gov. Mario Cuomo as acting like a "mafioso."

It was even done to an Italian American woman: Geraldine Ferraro chosen as Walter Mondale's ground-breaking, vice presidential pick in 1984. Respected journalist Sam Donaldson suggested to Ferraro that "Italian Americans

should expect the press to pursue allegations linking them to the Mafia." The issue is that many such links are quite often baseless, guilt-by-association tactics. Donaldson also conflated "the Mafia" in Sicily with "organized crime" in the U.S.

Italian Americans are, and have been, doctors, teachers, business leaders, writers, lawyers, scientists and even political and religious leaders (e.g., Pope Leo XIV's grandfather was Sicily-born Salvatore Giovanni Gaetano Riggitano Alito).

But with pitifully rare examples, you never see this vivid reality reflected on Hollywood movie screens.

Vergogna! (Shame!)

Bill Dal Cerro, senior analyst, Italic Institute of America, Chicago

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To paraphrase late carmaker Lee Iacocca:

"If you can find a better website than ours, use it."



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John Mancini - Founder and Executive Director

Mythology Rules!

Italic Studies is not my whole life, only part. But sometimes life draws you back to it just today, a young nephew and I walked past a branch of the Bank of America. As an Italian American college

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Bill Dal Cerro, Senior Analyst

BUON ANNO!

A new year brings good cheer—at least, that's everyone's hope. Speaking of cheers, a colleague of mine pointed out a rather odd irony in Stanley Tucci's recent series in Italy. Whenever dining with Italians, he would often use that very ...

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Rosario A. Iaconis, Senior Analyst

Ken Burns, Ignoring Founders' Reliance on Rome, Insists Iroquois 'Crucially Influenced' America's Revolution