



New York State Commission for Social Justice

Order Sons of Italy in America

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New York State Commission for Social Justice Fall 2020 Plenary Report Via Zoom October 31, 2020

New York State Commission for Social Justice
2020 Fall Plenary Session
Report

Brothers and Sisters,

I want to thank all of you for your continued support for the CSJ. I hope everyone had a good Columbus Day and Italian Heritage and Culture Month. I hope you used this month to be proud of our great culture and heritage.

2021 CSJ Luncheon

As you might expect this year's CSJ Luncheon at Russo's on the Bay will not take place. In its place we will be doing a virtual event to raise much needed funds for CSJ. Details will follow. CSJ Co-chair Eleanor Jobbagy has agreed to chair this year's function.

A Sad Goodbye

Josephine Cohan who has been a member of the CSJ Executive Board since its inception and chair of our annual luncheon for 39 years has decided to move to Florida. I want to thank her for her many years of service to the CSJ and her commitment to our Italian American culture. I wish her well in the sunshine state. She will be sorely missed.

The attacks on our heritage continue and is getting more common and acceptable. For many years, our fight was against Hollywood and the media for promoting the stigma of Italian Americans being mobbed up and connected. This was the constant battle that we waged, and it continues today. However, the more serious attacks that we have been fighting were the attacks our heritage and culture in so many ways. These too seem to be acceptable and even worse politically acceptable. No other group in this Country would allow this to happen to them, Why should we?

Italian Heritage and Culture Month

Did anyone notice how the media totally ignored the fact that October is Italian Heritage and Culture month. Has anyone realized how suddenly it became Hispanic Heritage month? Not one media outlet mentioned that October was a month for us to show off our pride in being Italian Americans. ABC channel seven did show the Columbus Day Parade, which by the way we pay for that broadcast. Other stations hardly mentioned the parade. Elected Officials were busy saying Happy Indigenous Peoples Day. This adds one more attack against us. The media and elected officials are working over-time to

erase our heritage and all the great accomplishments made by Italians and Italian Americans.

Attacks on Columbus

In Syracuse, Mayor Ben Walsh gave our community a good slap in the face. As I have mentioned last month, Walsh who always claimed to be supportive of our Italian American Community and the Columbus statue formed a commission to recommend to either keep the statue or remove it from Columbus Square. The Syracuse Italian American Community heard that a decision was imminent, and they urged the mayor to hold off making an announcement until after Columbus Day. Well, you guessed it, this pandering politician announced the Friday before Columbus Day that the statue would be removed. What adds insult to injury, the Native population of Syracuse is less than 5% while the Italian American population is much higher. The Italian American community is not accepting this insult without a fight. They have three lawyers that are working together to file a lawsuit against the mayor and the City. Our CSJ is with them in this battle and has donated \$5,000.00 to be used to defend our heritage and culture against this attack. They are going to need more funds for this legal battle. I am urging all to donate to the Columbus Monument Committee to help with the legal costs. Author of Debunking Howard Zinn, Mary Grabar did reach out to Syracuse and offered support and assistance. **We cannot allow pandering politicians like Ben Walsh to get away with this, it is time we do what we can send a message to him and every other politician that we are coming after you.** We are not a political organization, but we must defend our heritage.

In the Arthur Avenue section of the Bronx there is another attack against that community's Columbus statue. The community has done a great job in challenging those that tried to take it down. We offered any help necessary to Arthur Avenue and to join with them to protect the Columbus statue. I have made several attempts to set up a meeting and offer our assistance. To date, there has been no response. I will stay on top of this situation and take any steps needed to protect the Columbus statue.

In Brooklyn, there was an attempt to have the Columbus statue removed from the park outside the Federal Court House. As of today, there is no support to remove this statue.

Sag Harbor School District has announced in October that they are forming a commission to decide whether to remove Columbus Day from their school calendar and replace it with Indigenous Peoples Day. Some members of the board want to move slowly, knowing this issue is controversial. Sag Harbor is in close proximity to Southampton,

who also tried to eliminate Columbus Day. We must fight any attempt of removing the Columbus holiday from both calendars.

The National Columbus Education Foundation and the Columbus Heritage Coalition

The National Columbus Education Foundation is a 501c3 not for profit organization. OSDIA along with four other major Italian American Organization each donated \$50,000.00 each as seed money to begin the process of eradicating the negative narrative of Columbus. Joe Sciamè and Robert Ferrito sit on this board of directors. Lou Gallo has been asked to work with the foundation's educational component. Lou has been very active all across our Country speaking to groups about the true narrative of Columbus. He has been instrumental in changing some of the minds of those previously opposed to Columbus. I want to thank Lou for all he is doing in defending Columbus.

Columbus, as Taught in the Schools

Lou Gallo and his committee have been working with Robert Graham to begin to launch a Columbus website. Currently, they are searching for an attractive domain name. We are hoping to have this website completed soon.

LaBella Lingua Award – MaryAnn Rispoli

2020 NYS OSDIA CSJ “La Bella Lingua Award” program

The following is a final report regarding 2020 NYS OSDIA CSJ “La Bella Lingua Award” program. Listed are the six participating NYS District's “La Bella Lingua Award” Program Chairs followed by Award recipient and their High School. All recipients received \$500 funded by OSDIANYS Grand Lodge Foundation. (District II Liaisons' personally funded a second award in memory of CSJ District II's Chairperson Jean Gagliardo.)

District I – Geraldine Iannello-Graham, “La Bella Lingua Award” Program Chairperson
Recipient: Michael Parrinello, Commack High School

District II – Mary Ann Rispoli, “La Bella Lingua Award” Program Chairperson
Recipient: Christopher Piccirillo, Herricks High School

A Second \$500 Award funded by District II Liaisons in memory of District II Chairperson Jean Gagliardo.

Recipient: Mary Sotiryadis, North Shore High School

District III - Carl Ciaccio, “La Bella Lingua Award” Program Chairperson

Recipient: Antonia Greco, Susan Wagner High School

District V – Susan Alicea, “La Bella Lingua Award” Program Chairperson
Recipient: Christian Sciarretta, Clarkstown South High School

District VII – Carmine Federico, “La Bella Lingua Award” Program Chairperson
Recipient: Jennifer Klix, Solvay High School

District VIII – Marjorie Focarazzo, “La Bella Lingua Award” Program Chairperson
Recipient: Francesca Carmella Martinez, Greece Athena High School.

2021 NYS OSDIA CSJ “La Bella Lingua Award” program

In January 2021 "La Bella Lingua Award" selection process will begin with each of the eight NYS District chairs mailing letters and applications to **all** High Schools that offer Italian Language courses in their District. Three individual mailing will be addressed to: 1. Principal 2. Guidance Department 3. Teachers of Italian Language. The mailing's cover letter will request that the HS Italian Language Teachers select one of their most qualified graduating seniors (completing at least three years of Italian Language courses). The school must then submit **two** copies of their applicant's official transcript, letter of recommendation, completed application and student's essay to the District Chair before determined designated submission deadline date.

Mary Ann Rispoli, NYS OSDIA CSJ “La Bella Lingua Award” Program Chairperson
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I want to take the time to thank MaryAnn Rispoli for chairing this award and doing a fantastic job.

John Dabbene Essay Contest Award

We are changing the focus of this year's John Dabbene Essay contest. This year we are asking contestants to write about their Italian American Heritage rather than an Immigrant Experience. This way we can get our young people learning about their heritage and hoping to instill in them the greatness and pride in being Italian Americans. The committee is working on the details of this contest and they will be released soon. I would like to thank Geraldine Graham for chairing this award and doing a great job.

In closing, I am urging all to stay united and involved in our fight to defend our heritage. If you hear of any issues negatively affecting our heritage, please get it to us ASAP.

Our CSJ is only as great as the brothers and sisters on our executive board and our lodge liaisons. Each of them is totally committed to defending and promoting a positive image of our heritage. I thank each of them.

Brothers and Sisters, I want to thank you for your support to CSJ.