



New York. Kick-off Event for the "Italian Heritage & Culture Month"

Francesca Giuliani (October 08, 2011)

October the 7th was the official starting date for the 2011 edition of the "Italian Heritage & Culture Month", organized by the Italian Heritage and Culture Committee of New York for the last thirty-five years.

In a public flag raising ceremony held at Poses Park, in the facilities of CUNY's Hunter College, where artist Giuseppe Massari's statue of "Mother Italy" is located, Joseph Sciamè, President and Chairman of the Committee, presented this year's selected theme for the celebration, which is the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy.

Sciamè highlighted the importance of heroic figures such as Garibaldi, Mazzini and Cavour in contributing to the freedom and the independence of Italy. Asking how many people in the audience had ever visited Giuseppe Garibaldi's tomb on the Sardinian island of Caprera, he confessed that the time he went he couldn't leave without at least taking away a cone from one of the pine trees surrounding it. "I hold it as a treasure," he said.

Nancy Indelicato, Co-Chair of Public Relations for the Italian Heritage and Culture Committee, and this year's Honoree for her ongoing contributions to Italian heritage and culture, admits that, researching on Garibaldi to write all the educational materials for the "Italian Heritage & Culture Month," she became a "Garibaldi groupie." "If I were living in his times, I would have jumped on a boat in Civitavecchia and rowed all the way to Caprera just to meet him," she said.

Indelicato tells i-Italy about the incredible journey her research on the Italian Independence Wars and Risorgimento took her to: "The five decades-long struggle for unification really led to freedom from foreign oppression and independence and finally unification, which also laid the foundations for the republic of Italy as we know it today. All of us who love Italy, or who are Italian or Italian-American, we are really indebted to the heroes of the Risorgimento, Garibaldi, Mazzini, Cavour, and we celebrate them."

Indelicato also stressed the importance of researching in areas in which the researcher has no previous preparation, to really grasp the essence of the historical events and share that information with everybody, and the younger generations in particular.

Joseph Di Trapani, National President of "Order Sons of Italy in America," was happy to share his enthusiasm for the start of the "Italian Heritage & Culture Month" with i-Italy. "It is very important to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy this year. Every year, this is the month when all the Italian-Americans can celebrate who they are, and today is a great day for us all." What defines the identity of the Italian-Americans today, Di Trapani says, "is the common bond, the common thread that unites us all. We all arrived here the same way: our grandparents, our parents,



sometimes even ourselves. We are Americans first, but we don't forget our roots and our Italian heritage. We are all of the same background."

Minister Natalia Quintavalle, Consul General of Italy in New York, was present at the ceremony. In her speech she defined "suggestive and meaningful" to raise the American and the Italian flags in front of the statue of "Mother Italy", in a place so important for the Italian community such as Hunter College, whose Dean for Diversity and Compliance Office John Rose attended the event.

Vita Rabinowitz, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs of Hunter College, and winner of the 2011 Cornaro Award, given each year by the New York Lodge of the Sons of Italy in America to an Italian American woman who holds a PhD and has "achieved excellence in her chosen field", stressed the same point as Consul Quintavalle, remembering the times when her father, who emigrated to New York in the 1930s, was admitted at CUNY, at the time known as "the Harvard of the poor".

Representing the Calandra Italian American Institute of CUNY Queens College, the very home of the Italian-American community at CUNY nowadays, was Dean Anthony Julian Tamburri. The ceremony was the occasion to honor the 2009 Da Vinci Award winner, astronaut Michael J. Massimino, a veteran of two Space Shuttle missions in 2002 and 2009, both servicing the Hubble Space Telescope.

A New Yorker of Sicilian descent, Massimino received the award and entertained the audience with anecdotes from his space trips, about the objects he decided to carry with him.

In 2002 he opted for a Sicilian flag that he presented to the President of Sicily upon return. In 2009, the International Astronomy Year and the 400th anniversary of Galileo Galilei's first space observations, Michael could honor his Italian heritage and his passion for astronomy taking to the Hubble Space Telescope Station an exact replica of Galileo's telescope, provided to him by the Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza of Florence. President of the Republic of Italy Giorgio Napolitano met Massimino in December 2009, when he returned the telescope to the Museo together with Italian fellow astronaut Paolo Nespoli. "It was a very important moment for me", Massimino stated.

Carolyn Reres, New York State deputy of "Order Sons of Italy in America," and former math teacher at H. Frank Carey High School in Franklin Square, was also present at the event. Massimino was one of her students, long before he was an astronaut. "One of the best things about being a teacher is to see the success of students, and Michael has succeeded in his career, but even more as a person," she says, and adds: "Michael presents the positive image that we as Americans of Italian heritage want the public to see."

For more information on the events of the "Italian Heritage & Culture Month visit the website: www.italyculturemonth.org [1]

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