



A Delightful Italian-American Day in New York's Capital of Albany

G. F. (June 17, 2013)



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Not many people are aware of the number of Italian-American legislators in New York State. This election cycle there are 49. In years past the number reached as high as the mid to high 50s. Considering that there are, as I write, 213 state legislators (150 assembly members, 63 senators), the number of Italian Americans is indeed substantial: 23 percent of the legislators in New York State are Italian Americans.

This past Monday, June 10, was Italian-American Day in Albany. Every year in June the New York Conference of Italian American Legislators holds an annual conference. Basically, their conference gathers to award a number of scholarships to college-bound students, honor members of the Italian-American community, and, at times, have a program of lectures.



This year the conference awarded four scholarships, two academic and two athletic; it inducted into the Conference as honorary member Italy's Consul General to New York, Natalia Quintavalle; and it honored as outstanding Italian American, the award-winning actress Annabella Sciorra.

Consul General Quintavalle spoke about the necessity of promulgating Italian culture in the United States, the continued need to keep the conversation alive between Italy and the United States, and the ever-present enterprise of teaching and promoting the Italian language in the United States. It is indeed through language that we maintain and, to be sure, grow our knowledge of Italy as it is today and its geo-cultural heritage.

The continued conversation about what is Italian-American identity today undergirded what Annabella Sciorra emphasized in her talk. As time passes with new immigrations and resultant populations changes, we must continue to interrogate what it means to be Italian and Italian American in the United States. In her exhortative shout out to the crowd, she urged them to visit the "new" John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, under the leadership of Dean Anthony Tamburri. She went on to underscore how the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute is the largest of its kind in the western hemisphere engaging in such important research.

Italian-American Day in Albany is traditionally capped off with the evening "festa" at the Italian American Community Center in Troy, NY. Here, in addition to the fine fare and drinks available, the New York Conference of Italian American Legislators also honors two of their own, one from the Assembly, the other from the Senate. This year, they honored Senator Tony Avella, from Queens, and Assembly Member William Magnarelli.

In addition to the fine fare, the "festa" also has an Annual Bocce Tournament, a grueling, four-hour test of wit and skill, as one of our staff members described it. This year the winning team was the "Stunods," made up of four members, three of whom are part of the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute's staff: Rosangela Briscese (The Pathfinder), Fred Gardaphé (The Striker), and Joseph Sciorra (the Mariano Rovera of bocce); local Albany paesano Frank Brino (Team Captain) rounded out the foursome.

Kudos to Assembly Member Donna Lupardo, President of the New York Conference of Italian American Legislators, and Assembly Member Michael DenDekker for having organized a delightful day in New York's capital of Albany.

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