

Before the 43rd NIAF Anniversary Gala



The night of Gala Receptions and the Awards Dinner were preceded by two days of Italian and Italian American events, many of them free and open to the public.

On Thursday evening, members of the [NIAF](#) [2]Board were joined by members of the Trump Administration, members of the Italian American Congressional Delegation, and Gala Honorees and VIPs at an exclusive reception and dinner at Washington power restaurant Café Milano, in the heart of Georgetown. With [Kellyanne Conway](#) [3], [Mark Paoletta](#) [4]and [Andrew Giuliani](#) [5], among others from the White House on hand, Minority Leader Rep. [Nancy Pelosi](#) [6]spoke movingly of growing up Italian American in Baltimore's Little Italy, of immigration, and of the Republican presidents she has worked effectively with in the past. As NIAF Co-Chair Patricia de Stacy Harrison put it in her opening remarks, "We want to thank you all for coming this evening, Republicans and Democrats. But tonight were all Italians!"

On Friday, afternoon, NIAF Co-Chairpersons [Patricia de Stacy Harrison](#) [7] and [Gabriel Battista](#) [8]oversaw the ribbon cutting ceremonies for the opening of The NIAF Museum on Italian Immigration, at NIAF headquarters. Nearly 100 guests came to view the museum's new exhibit brought directly from Italy.



Later on Friday, the college students participating in the NIAF on Campus Conference met at the Marriott Wardman Park with NIAF Board members and NIAF Italian American Leadership Council members to discuss strategy and network expansion plans to bring more Italian American students and Italian Studies students into the program in 2019.

Friday night officially kicked off the Gala Weekend with “An Evening with Lidia,” an exclusive dining experience with Chef [Lidia Bastianich](#) [9]. “This is what an intimate dinner looks like at NIAF. There are 300 people here,” said NIAF Gala Chairman [John Calvelli](#). [10]

NIAF Co-Chairperson Patricia de [Stacy Harrison](#) [11] introduced her friend Bastianich: “She is beloved throughout the world and known by just one name—Lidia....What is Lidia really like? One of the most authentic people you will ever meet.”

Then, Bastianich talked about her life, as detailed in her new memoir, “My American Dream: A Life of Love, Family, and Food,” and she introduced the menu, course by course, explaining their origins in Puglia and even some of the challenges of creating them for this event. Opera singer [Carlos De Antonis](#) [12] put on a memorable show to end the evening.

Saturday, from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m., NIAF opened the doors to its Expo Italiana, the largest annual Italian festival in the nation’s capital. Free and open to the public, the Expo again attracted more than 2,000 visitors with dozens of vendors, including 23 food and wine exhibitors directly from Puglia. Free samples was the standard of the day—with visitors tasting everything from finest wines made in Puglia, to DelGrosso’s always anticipated “meatball martinis,” to Lavazza espresso, Peroni beer, BiVi Sicilian vodka, Dolci Gelati’s crazy-delicious gelato, breads by Forni & Fattorie de Altamura, natural beverages from Il Melograno, freebies from Ferrero, and Alitalia’s business class comforts. Other booths included My Italian Family, Toscana Cigars, The Italian Knife Amer, LA Cucina Sabina, Damiano Durante Art, and many others.

Meanwhile, several conferences and sessions took place in the Exhibit Hall, including the Medical Conference on “the Impact of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles in Human Health”; learning basic Italian with the Italian Cultural Society of Washington D.C.; learned how to make gelato and tasted Dolci Gelati’s finest flavors; discovered the true story of the sinking of the Andrea Doria from a survivor; and screened the finalists’ documentaries competing in the [Russo Brothers](#) [13] Italian American Film Forum.

As singer [Vanessa Racci](#) [14]made her return engagement for the Gala Weekend, Expo guests queued through the Wine Pavilion feature more than a dozen Italian wines; inspected a beautiful new Alfa Romeo and gorgeous Maseratis; and lined up for NIAF’s annual free Italian lunch, this year provided in spectacular fashion by Clemente Bakery and Deli from Hackensack, N.J.

Overall, Gala Weekend attendees raved about the entire experience, so begin planning now to join us next year, November 1-2, 2019!

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Links

[1] <http://ftp.iitaly.org/files/beforethegalajpg>

[2] <http://www.niaf.org/>

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kellyanne_Conway

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Paoletta

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Giuliani

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nancy_Pelosi

[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patricia_Harrison

[8] <http://excellencemagazine.luxury/2018/03/the-national-italian-american-foundation-gabriel->



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[10] <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/author/john-f-calvelli>

[11] <https://www.cpb.org/aboutcpb/leadership/executives/harrison>

[12] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FprPq4Mk5t0>

[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo_brothers

[14] <http://vanessaracci.com/about/>