



Angelo Vivolo: “Preserving Our Heritage, Planning for the Future”

Otylia Coppola (October 06, 2016)



Established in 1944 in New York City, the Columbus Citizens Foundation is one of the best known Italian-American organizations in the country, much respected both in the US and Italy. It includes nearly 600 prominent men and women of Italian heritage representing the elds of law, medicine, government, business, education, and the arts. The Foundation describes its mission as “perpetuating pride in our Italian-American heritage, contributing to charitable causes, and encouraging and supporting the educational goals of young people through our grant and scholarship programs.” This year i-Italy partnered with the Foundation to produce this special section on the occasion of the Columbus Day Parade and Gala.

Mr. Vivolo, can you tell our readers something about the history of the Columbus Day Parade?

It started decades ago and has evolved over the years. [The Columbus Day Parade](#) [2] held in New York City is the largest in the world and began in 1929 when New York City businessman and Italian immigrant Generoso Pope led a parade from East Harlem to Columbus Circle. [Columbus Day](#) [3] was



declared a federal holiday to recognize Christopher Columbus for opening up the gateway from Europe to The New World. Italian Americans, facing much discrimination and bias, saw Columbus’s Italian origin as a way to legitimize their status as true American citizens.

Since then, the parade has evolved to celebrate all things Italian- American. It recognizes our past, but also looks ahead to the contributions Italian Americans will continue to make for the United States. In addition, it is a wonderful day for us to celebrate the special relationship between Italy and America. On Columbus Day, we celebrate not just the United States and Italian Americans, but also the nation of Italy and the Italian people as well.

How do you pick your Grand Marshals and the Honorees for your traditional Gala evening?

Each year there is a [Grand Marshal](#) [4] and several Honorees that are recognized for their contributions to Italian and Italian-American culture. Their contributions have and continue to take all forms - excellence in arts, positions of leadership in the world of business and technology, humanitarian efforts and many more. Our Grand Marshal and Honorees are presented with awards during the Gala event on Saturday, October 8 at the Waldorf Astoria, and of course they lead off the official Columbus Day Parade on Monday, October 10. Previous Parade Grand Marshals are a Who’s Who of famous Italians and Italian-Americans, including Frank Sinatra, Sophia Loren, Tony Bennett, [Frank Bisignano](#) [5], Roberto Cavalli, Mario Andretti, Susan Lucci, Joseph Plumeri, [Maria Bartiromo](#) [6], [Joe DiMaggio](#) [7] and the recently passed Supreme Court Justice [Antonin Scalia](#) [8].

This year you have picked Mr. Robert LaPenta as the parade’s Grand Marshal. Why?

[Robert LaPenta](#) [9] is a game changer in the world of business, and we are incredibly honored to have him not only as Grand Marshal of this year’s parade but also as a member of our Foundation. Robert is Founding General Partner of Aston Capital Partners and is renowned for his leadership experience in the aerospace, defense and electronics industries. He is also a noted philanthropist who believes in giving back to future generations. He was the first in his family to attend college and is responsible for donating the largest single gift to his alma mater, Iona College. His selection as Grand Marshal exemplifies the core purpose of the Columbus Day Parade - to celebrate the achievements, success and heritage of the Italian Americans.

You are also celebrating Italian cuisine and fashion by honoring Mario Batali and Federica Marchionni. A few words on these choices?

Mario Batali and Federica Marchionni are not only leaders in their respective industries, but they are also true visionaries admired throughout the city. Their selection as honorees is a testament to their many accomplishments. To have our Grand Marshal Robert LaPenta lead the parade with Mario and Federica by his side speaks to the vitality and importance of Italians and Italian Americans in the fields of food, fashion and business.

Your activities are not limited to the Parade. Could you describe the work of the Foundation?

[The Columbus Citizens Foundation](#) [10], through a broad range of philanthropic and cultural activities, provides opportunities for advancement to deserving Italian-American students through various scholarship and grant programs. In the coming school year, the Foundation is providing scholarship assistance to over 700 students. In addition, the Foundation actively supports organizations, causes, and relief efforts

that impact Italy and Italian-Americans. Following the terrible [earthquake](#) [11] in Italy this summer, we immediately began raising funds through our members to help those in need as a result of that heart-breaking tragedy.

What plans do you have for 2016-2017? Anything in the pipeline that you could anticipate? In particular, initiatives that can involve the new generations?



To begin with, we really do start planning our 2017 Columbus Day Celebrations right after the 2016 Parade ends – so as Fifth Avenue is being returned to normal that Monday afternoon, our minds are already on the year ahead – and we start securing sponsors, considering potential Grand Marshals and strategizing on how to keep growing the parade and its audience year after year. From a Foundation membership point of view, we continue to grow. We love when a former scholarship recipient has used their education to succeed in their field and returns to the Foundation as a member – nothing beats this full circle of our mission statement, which we see realized often. We also recently launched a Young Adult membership that has seen an influx of under 30’s enter the Foundation to carry on our work. In addition, 2016 saw the creation of our first mentorship and intern program which places former scholarship students into businesses run by our members, and this is an effort we hope to grow significantly in 2017.

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