

## **IACC Annual Luncheon. Piaggio Runs the Motors of Italian-American Economic Relationships**

Marina Melchionda (April 21, 2010)



On April 14, the Italy America Chamber of Commerce hosted its Annual Spring Luncheon at the New York Palace Hotel. On that occasion, the President and CEO of Piaggio Group Americas, Paolo Timoni, was honored with the institution's Business and Culture Award "in recognition of his contributions in strengthening the commercial ties between Italy and the USA"

In the heart of Midtown Manhattan, on elegant Madison Avenue, surrounded by tall and imposing skyscrapers, the [New York Palace Hotel](#) [2] rears with true old-fashioned charm. It is re-known for being one of the most exclusive spots in New York, chosen by businessmen and guests from all over the world for their occasional visits to the city. On the second floor of this magnificent structure, just one flight of steps up from the big garden decorated with French-style chairs and coffe-tables in



wrought iron, the Annual Luncheon of the [Italy-America Chamber of Commerce](#) [3] took place on April 14.

As many of you know, every year the Institution honors an individual or entity that has excelled in the promotion of high-end Italian products in the United States through the presentation of its Business & Culture Awards. As we walked around the garden and the rooms that welcomed us for a pre-lunch cocktail, we learned right away who was this year's winner: the most luminous and elegant corners of the venue were occupied by a motorcycle labeled [Piaggio](#) [4], the Italian company established in 1884, famous worldwide for its most popular model, the [Vespa](#) [5].

Institutional representatives and both Italian-American businessmen members of the IACC attended the event to congratulate Paolo Timoni, President and CEO of [Piaggio Group Americas](#) [6] (PGA). Among them were the Consul General of Italy in New York, Francesco Maria Talò; the President of the [Italian Trade Commission](#) [7], Aniello Musella; the President of the [Italian American Committee on Education](#) [8], Berardo Paradiso; and the Attache for Cultural Affairs - Language and Literature at the [Italian Cultural Institute](#) [9], Giovanni Desantis. The former President of IACC, Alberto Comini, was also there together with the IACC Economic Advisor Professor, Giuseppe Ammendola, and the IACC Secretary General, Franco De Angelis.

As lunch was about to begin in the Palace's Reid Salon, were some hundreds of us found a seat at the elegantly decorated tables, Consul General Talò stepped onto the stage to welcome us. "It is a pleasure to attend this event once again, as I consider IACC a symbol of one of the greatest links between the United States and Italy, the economic one. No better representative of this bond than Paolo Timoni could have been chosen this year. I myself own a Vespa, and I use it for both business and personal travel. Mine is not only a way to promote an historical Italian brand, but it is also a pleasure I enjoy, especially in the spring time."

At the end of his speech, he personally paid homage to Mr. Timoni, "in recognition of his contributions to strengthen commercial ties between Italy and the USA", as well as for his role in creating a name for superior technology, craftsmanship and design of Italian two-wheeled vehicles in the United States.

Paolo Timoni joined the Piaggio Group in 2004, leading it to become the 1st motor scooter player in the USA in terms of total value of retail products. In 2006 AdvertisingAge named his [Vespanomics](#) [10] advertisement campaign one of the ten most innovative in the US.

Under his leadership, the Piaggio Group, a leading distributor of motor scooters and motorcycles marketed under the [Aprilia](#) [11], [Moto Guzzi](#) [12], Piaggio, and Vespa brands, conquered 40% of the American market. Just in 2009, its sales increased by 20% with a dealership network that has consistently grown nationally (80% for Aprilia; 60% for Moto Guzzi; and 360% a year for Piaggio/Vespa in the period 2004-2009).

Mr. Timoni was awarded by IACC's new president, Claudio Bozzo of [Mediterranean Shipping Co., Inc.\(USA\)](#) [13], who started his presentation with a funny quotation by his mother, "the best marketing agent" he has ever met: "My mother always told her girlfriends that if they wanted to remain young they had two choices: go to the plastic surgeon, or get themselves a Vespa". As the entire room broke into laughter, he went on to emphasize the main advantages of owning a Piaggio product in a big city such as New York: "You contribute to the lowering of pollution in the area, consume less and thus spend less, and have much better chances of finding a parking space".

"A Piaggio Vespa", he concluded, "not only is a fashion product that has conquered Hollywood and big stars decades ago, but can also help you face the greatest difficulties of your everyday life in the city. Just think of the traffic, and the zigzagging you can do with your motorcycle..."

Mr. Timoni, finally, thanked all of those attending, but also all the Piaggio employees in both the U.S. and Italy for all the work they have done to support his efforts.

As we were served dessert and were about to leave, Mr. Timoni concluded his speech with a very inspiring thought that made us realize how committed to, but also passionate, he is to his role at this



historical Italian company. "There are four elements that characterize my work at Piaggio in the last four years: inspiration; passion; resolution; results. I can see all of them coming alive when I walk around New York and find Vespas parked on the sidewalk and street. It's very satisfying for me: it's not only a personal accomplishment, but something I reached with a team of people, and I am proud of it".

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