

Networking Italophiles in the Tri-State Area

Interview with Consul General Francesco Genuardi (May 24, 2017)



In the Tri-State Area there is a large population of Italophiles—people with a stated interest in all things Italian. One of the missions of the Consulate General is to turn this wide and diverse population of Italophiles into a well-connected community.

Consul General Francesco Genuardi oversees the Tri-state area—the states of New York, New Jersey,



and Connecticut. One of his fundamental jobs is to work in conjunction with the Italian Embassy in Washington to support Italy's cultural and commercial presence in the area

Sistema Italia as Teamwork

The Consulate doesn't carry out its job alone. On the contrary, it is flanked by a host of institutions that comprise what is known as the "Sistema Italia," which include the Italian Cultural Institute (IIC), the Italian Trade Commission (ICE), the Government Tourist Board (ENIT), as well as the Italia-America Chamber of Commerce and, last but not least, Banca d'Italia.

"In conjunction with the Italian Embassy of Washington, we are responsible for the Sistema Italia in New York," says Genuardi, "We coordinate the activities of all its entities in the area under our jurisdiction." This coordinating role is something that Mr. Genuardi takes very seriously because, he says, "We're convinced that only through teamwork can we achieve what we hop to achieve. All of the offices involved understand the added value of teamwork."

The Three "Italian" Communities of NY

Naturally, this system's promotional activities cater to all Americans, though just as naturally, they cater primarily to Italophiles—people with a stated interest in all things Italian such as art, culture, food, fashion and lifestyle, as well as in our achievements in the fields of industry, scientific research, and medicine. That population is particularly large in the Tri-State area for two reasons, explains Genuardi: first, the presence of one of the largest Italian-American communities and second, the constant arrival of young Italians, a population that continues to grow. (Today there are roughly 90,000 Italian citizens residing in this area.) "Italy has always had a particularly vibrant presence here. It is a cornerstone of New York life, whether we're talking about culture, science, economics, or retail. And today Italian immigration is being enriched by all of these new presences."

One of the missions of the Consulate General of Italy is to turn this wide and diverse Italophile population into a community. That task is of primary importance to the Consul General. "We try to energize these various groups with initiatives and events aimed at keeping the communities united and increasingly expanding the community of lovers of Italy who reside in New York. To that end, there are also different forms of reaching out to those communities. Each group has different communication needs even if the message—to promote what makes the country great—is the same."

Two Series Sponsored by the Consulate

In fact, besides organizing activities with other institutions in the Italian System—the cultural activities are described by director of ICI, Giorgio Van Straten in the next article—the Consulate also offers its own program of events with this very variety in mind.

For example, the Meet the New Italians of New York series caters to the new generation of Italian immigrants. The monthly series invites leading testimonials of the Italian community to talk about their professional success in the sciences, food industry, arts, journalism and medicine, to mention just a few fields. "The series has been a hit," beams Genuardi. "I inherited the series from my predecessor, Natalia Quintavalle, with the help of the whole consulate team, and it really works well. The title may be in English, but the series is geared to the young Italian community here in New York. It's a chance for people to share their stories and it also has practical benefits, like a mentorship. It's an effective way of introducing young people to our work, opening our doors, and transforming the Consulate into a place where people gather and exchange information useful for their professional careers."

"For the American public at large," continues Genuardi, "the Consulate launched a series of events called New York Loves Italy. The series is centered around leading members of the New York community whose lives, educations and professions have been profoundly influenced by Italian culture—and who, in turn, have influenced the professional and personal lives of many important New Yorkers." The first event in the series, "Digital Challenges Between Tradition and Innovation," took place last fall and was a one-on-one interview between Italian journalist and Princeton



University professor Gianni Riotta and Chief Digital Officer of New York City Sreenath 'Sree' Sreenivasan. The event planned for late spring will be dedicated to art with Ronald Lauder. "After that," says Genuardi, "we'll be co-hosting an event with the New Yorker to honor translation star Ann Goldstein, as well as other events, before celebrating the Festa della Repubblica on June 2."

The Importance of Communication

The success of these events partially depends on the giant communications job undertaken by the Consulate General working in tandem with local media organizations—groups fundamental for spreading the word about all of the events connected to Italian culture in New York. "In the world of 2017, communication is essential," says Genuardi. "We've been very happy with the active presence of various English and Italian-language media outlets operating to cover what's happening in Italy and with Italians in New York."

On our way out, Genuardi throws in a kind word about our own initiative: "We really appreciate the work of i-Italy a lot. It's a very particular and innovative platform that reaches a large audience of Italy lovers in New York. You do an excellent job keeping up with all of the events and following all of the thematic threads that run through Italy in New York. And your current efforts to take your project national is a sign of the importance and success of the work you're doing."

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