



## **COPOMAIO, a Hub for Italian American Organizations**

Roberta Cutillo (November 18, 2019)



Following the Conference of Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations' annual meeting in Washington DC on November 2, we asked its Chair, Dr. Aileen Riotto Sirey, to tell us a little more about the coalition's history and its future. A retired psychotherapist, Dr. Sirey is also the Founder and Chair Emerita of the National Organization of Italian American Women (NOIAW). She has been serving as COPOMAIO's Chair since 2018.

**As the Chair of the Conference of Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations, can you tell us about this coalition? What are some of the services and activities it carries out?**

[The Conference of Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations \(COPOMAIO\)](#) [2] is in its 44th year! We enroll Italian and Italian American organizations and provide a clearinghouse for



centralized thinking and unified directional guidance on matters advanced by our member organizations. We encourage, support and lend coordinative assistance to efforts and activities of common interest and concern of our members.

**What does your appointment as Chair mean to you after so many years serving the Italian American community?**

As I approach our 40th Anniversary and my tenure as Founder, first President and Chair of the National Organization of Italian Women, I have always enjoyed being a representative at COPOMAIO meetings. I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to learn about other organizations in our community and listen to the struggles that ensued in achieving of some measure unified thinking among all members .

As a child I had only 2 siblings, but I grew up surrounded by my mother's family where she had 7 siblings and my father's family and he also had 7 siblings. Each of their siblings married... and multiplied! As I grew older and family moved away from the old neighborhood, and the elders died, my years serving Italian American community became a replacement for MY BIG ITALIAN FAMILY!

**What does it mean to be the first woman to serve this role?**

I'm pleased and honored and wonder why it took 44 years! Hopefully in the future more leaders will emerge with XX chromosome!!

**You just had a meeting on November 2nd in DC, can you tell us about it? What were some of the points discussed?**

Our meeting was consumed by several important topics. First was a well received and extensive report by Angelo Vivolo and his efforts on behalf of Columbus and Mother Cabrini through his [Columbus Heritage Coalition](#) [3]. We approved funds for the Bellini Fellowship for a doctoral student dissertation sponsored by [Calandra Institute](#) [4] and we voted three more organizations into membership, bringing our membership close to 50 organizations.

Our biggest discussion/problem has been raising \$25,000 to match a challenge grant of the same amount offered by Basil Russo's organization the American Sons and Daughters of Italy. We will keep at it!

**Are there any other major plans you have for the future?**

Having served just one year as Chair, my focus has been twofold. First I have worked to build the rudiments to institutionalize COPOMAIO by developing an email address, a [Facebook Page](#) [5], and a [website](#) [2] (where you can make a donation if you wish! My second approach is to build a truly



national Conference of Presidents. Our member organizations are primarily based on the east coast with a few other groups located around the country. I have traveled to Chicago a few weeks ago, I will be going to New Orleans in March and hope to get to the West Coast before our next meeting in June to broaden our membership.

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**Links**

[1] <http://iitaly.org/files/niafriottopng-0>

[2] <https://copomiaio.org/>

[3] <https://columbuseritagecoalition.com/>

[4] <https://calandrainstitute.org/>

[5] <https://www.facebook.com/Conference-of-Presidents-of-Major-Italian-American-Organizations-791684017883600/>