

The Italian Heritage and Cultural Month celebrated in the Bronx

Marina Melchionda (October 30, 2008)



On October 23, Mary Sansone, Monsignor John A. Ruvo, Patricia Santangelo, and Anthony J. Tamburri were recognized as prominent members of the Italian-American community in the United States. For the occasion, the Arthur Avenue market became an Italian piazza where the whole neighborhood gathered and cheered.

On Thursday, the Bronx celebrated Italian Heritage and Cultural Month – and it did it the Italian way.

First of all, there was a piazza. The setting of the celebration was indeed a market, the [Arthur Avenue market](#) [2]. You couldn't help but call it a piazza. The vendors at their counters offering Italian goodies and specialties formed a neat semi-circle where people met and chatted.



The aroma of salami, prosciutto, and fresh, grilled Italian veggies filled everybody's noses when waiters started approaching guests with platters full of food: panini, bruschette, spiedini, pizzette.... It was a big picnic where everyone was invited. Just like a piazza, the market resembled a meeting place where people could come and go, meeting friends and making new ones.

Why not? With a glass of wine in your hand and a story in your pocket you can become everyone's friend in the Bronx's Little Italy. There is one language: Italian. There are one thousand dialects, but there is no localism, no provincialism. There is, instead, a deep, true, sincere, and pleasant nationalism. People are not mysterious about their Italian origins. They feel it's a credit to who they are; that's why they call each other paesano. And they look at the green, white, and red balloons and flowers that surround them and think those are their colors.

That's why they remember the Italian national anthem by heart and they sing it proudly, some with sparkling eyes. Because in the Bronx your Italian parents and grandparents care about your "Italicity": they teach your ancestors' traditions, language, culture, and customs. They raise you as an American citizen, but one with Italian blood.

This was the atmosphere in which Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion, Jr. welcomed and recognized some of the most prominent representatives of the Italian-American community. These are the individuals who did their best, who put all of their efforts into safeguarding Italian culture and language in the United States. They were the first to realize that Italians could offer much to this country, and therefore worked to enhance Italians' integration into their new homeland.

Four of them were chosen for this year's award. The first, in order of presentation, was Mary Sansone, founder and organizer of the [Congress of Italian-American Organization, Inc](#) [3]. This tiny lady, less than 5 feet tall and dressed in black, is the living demonstration that even at 93 that you can still fight for the causes you believe in: beginning in the 1970s, she was committed to promoting racial harmony in New York and in easing feuds among Italians living in the Bronx.

Monsignor John A. Ruvo was recognized for his 23 years as pastor of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in the Belmont community. He still works very hard in order to keep alive the "old Italian traditions," as he likes to say.

He was followed by Patricia Santangelo, president of the Italian Heritage and Culture Committee of the Bronx and Westchester and presenter of the Leoni di San Marco Awards. This young Italian-American has dedicated her entire life to the fighting anti-Italian prejudice.

Then last but not least, Anthony J. Tamburri, Dean of [John D. Calandra Italian American Institute](#) [4] and President of [American Association of Teachers of Italian \(AATI\)](#). [5] The professor was recognized for his commitment to promoting the diffusion and preservation of the Italian language within the United States. H

The Consul General of Italy Francesco Maria Talò joined the award recipients for a nice Italian dinner, served at a long table right in the middle of the piazza.

The Italian party ended with the cutting of a marvelous and delicious Italian cake, promptly tasted by the two hundred people or so present. Finally, the words and notes of old Neapolitan and Roman songs such as Malafemmena and La Società dei Magnaccioni accompanied people on their way home.



Edited by Giulia Prestia

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