



Westchester Italian Cultural Center: Where Italy and Its Regions Come Alive

Sara Capraro (April 13, 2009)



A short distance from Manhattan in a setting that embodies italianità, Chef Salvatore Presti presented regional Sicilian dishes.



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Generoso Pope's dream was to recreate a bit of Italy within the charming streets of Westchester, in order to preserve and foster the infinite culture that has exemplified the Bel Paese for millennia. Pope, who was originally from Benevento, arrived in America in 1906, and after years of hard work became a millionaire. As the editor of the newspaper *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, in 1947 he created the Generoso Pope Foundation to continue his philanthropic activity for the benefit of his fellow countrymen.

More than sixty years later, his philanthropic mission has been realized in its most tangible form at the [Westchester Italian Cultural Center](#) [3], an organization founded by Generoso's great-grandson, David Pope, to follow the path established by his great-grandfather.

The Westchester Italian Cultural Center was created with the aim of preserving, promoting, and celebrating the rich heritage of both classic and contemporary Italian culture through activities that focus on the language, art, history, and cuisine of Italy. The events range from cooking classes for children to teaching the Italian language, from art exhibits to film and documentary screenings, from workshops to dinners and galas. Here there is truly something for everyone, and everything is done with a touch of *italianità*.

Patrizia Calce, Westchester Italian Cultural Center's Program Administrator, met us as we arrived at the center and graciously showed us the rooms where the many activities take place.

Beginning with the lecture hall, there are 64 seats and the opportunity to attend a variety of lectures, concerts, theatrical

performances, and film screenings. Continuing on to the library, this is a quiet and relaxing space where one will find great books in both English and Italian, and it is also used as a study area during Italian classes. From there we arrive at the kitchen where cooking classes are held along with workshops and demonstrations for children, families, and senior citizens.

A well-appointed cooking and wine center must also have a cantina, and the center's cantina features wines from all twenty regions of Italy. Two of the most interesting spaces at the center are the Arpaize Exhibit Hall and the Calabria Exhibit Hall, galleries which are reserved for exhibits and displays, such as ceramics, artifacts, photographs, and art created by Italian artists. The Anthony J. Pope Board Room is a refined conference room and it is where the center's board of directors regularly meets.

We finally arrive at the banquet hall, an exquisite ballroom reserved for receptions in honor of special guests, dinners, and fundraising events. There is also the dining room, an elegant space which hosted a Sicilian gala dinner last Saturday evening.

Illustrious guests from the Italian American community attended, such as Consul General of Italy Francesco Maria Talò, and everyone tasted the sumptuous dishes prepared by Chef Salvatore Presti.

Each course was beautifully presented with rich color and texture, and the flavors were redolent of Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean. Cheeses, regional specialties such as pasta with pistachios and sardines, fish, cannoli, cassata, and many more dishes were all paired with excellent wine.

This extraordinary event concluded with a presentation about a project sponsored by the [Associazione Euroform](#) [4], funded by the Region of Sicily, and realized in collaboration with the Consul General of Italy in New York. The project is intended to enhance Sicily's image abroad while promoting its exceptional regional products.

President of Euroform, Salvatore Licata, along with Antonio Messina, Representative of Sicilians in New York, and Vincenzo La Fata, Officer of the Region of Sicily's Department of Labor, recently gave a presentation on this project at an event at the Italian Consulate two days before.



This special evening was dedicated to superb cuisine in a distinguished venue designed for those who love and want to experience Italian tradition firsthand.

(Translated by Giulia Prestia)

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