The Columbus Circle Art Project. Really?

Anthony Julian Tamburri (September 24, 2012)



What you find below is an email that Joseph Guagliardo sent out to a number of people a few days ago. Being one of the people on his list, I asked him if I could share it with you all here on i-Italy, so that more of you would also see it. He immediately said yes. While Mr. Guagliardo's email below speaks to the specifics of the Columbus Statue's current state of affairs — namely, the Tatzu Nishi

enclosure and the creation of a living room in which to visit Columbus — it speaks to a series of much larger issues as well, albeit indirectly in this context.

Introduction: The questions raised by Mr. Guagliardo's text below, both directly and indirectly, are: "Who speaks for the Italian-American Community?"; "Why can/should there not be an array of voices in/for the Italian-American Community?"; "What is the motivation behind the various and sundry protests for what seems to be everything someone not Italian American does concerning Italian-American issues?"; "How can one be so bold as to criticize/complain about activities and other issues when they do not attend the many activities/watch the various films/read the various books that represent things Italian and/or Italian-American that seem to cause them such a violent case of 'agida'?"

These are some of the many questions the Italian-American Community needs to address, that community that consists of altruistic, dedicated members who do not rush to the front of the line to speak to the reporter and/or get their face time on the news, if the event is in fact ever reported.

In the meantime, I leave you to Mr. Guagliardo's cogent email below.

Buona lettura! AJT

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Dear Friend.

As you may know I have been at the helm of the National Council of Columbia Associations for 12 years. It has been an interesting journey rebuilding this wonderful organization. It is quite rewarding.

I got to meet many of you…. I have learned so much. But now I need a lesson on understanding what drives some people in our community. I understand we have a need for media attention. But to do it on the heels of something good and sound is just plain confusing to me.

A few Italian American leaders have come out attacking anyone of Columbus circle. When I asked why I was told “No Italian Involvement,” “the Timing is Wrong,” and “It is a mockery” and “Disrespect to the Italian Community.”

As I said, I have been the President of the Council for 12 years. 30 years before me a wreath laying ceremony started at Columbus Circle. But in my 12 years, I did the ceremony with 12 people and a singer present. I did it in front of 400 people; I did it with celebrities and Civil Servants. In the Rain, Cold and Heat. On Columbus Day and the Day before.

I stood every year with Arthur Pirozzi and Pietro Segalini. In 2008, Columbus Citizens Foundation and I partnered, spectacular event, with their honorees in attendance and Chair and President. Along with Alfred Catalanotto.

Why am I saying this? I never saw one person in the National Council Ceremony now criticizing the Columbus Circle Project. I'm reading it as if some of you have actually had an interest in an Italian American Organization having an Italian American Project at and Italian Statue named after an Italian. NO sense of ownership at all! Yet some of you condemned it sight unseen.

I announced today in public on media with no Italian Organizations other then the National Council and the Media present, to the Mayor my gratitude for the project, I thanked the Art Foundation and the Artist for making it real and feasible.

I recall having a wreath laying ceremony under scaffolds the last time the statue was cleaned up, I remember having the celebration when it was the in the center of construction and we feared it was being used as a storage area for the construction company. I remember the Council going early at wreath laying clearing the area, washing the red paint off the statue and the graffiti. And I remember being the only hands getting dirty and the only voice asking for help. And the very people condemning this project really had no interest.

I ask only why? In thirty seconds, shorter then it took to write this email, I told the world, anyone who has condemned this project from the ITALIAN American community HAS NEVER supported the Council or a project that was IN FACT performed and sponsored by Italian American projects. When asked I further explained that there was no single voice from the Italian American Community, in fact my quote to Italics was: “The voice of the Italian American Community is just as diverse as the City of New York.”

It is sad that The National Council has done so much, as have others, only to be stepped on by “leaders” in the Italian American community so they may merely get their names in the paper.

Is it Ego? Is it because controversy makes you money? Is it something else? I mean no disrespect; as a blue collar in a blue blood community, I know my place. I only ask to understand, what is the desired outcome to step on an organization that is a hard working symbol of the American way?

I thank you for your time, and for the incredible amount of support I and the Council have already received once we went public with our side of the issue. But I'd still like to know why from other States and Counties you know what is best for Columbus Circle and the Italians who care for it?

AGAIN, I'd like to invite you out on OCT 7, 2012 to our wreath laying ceremony. At Columbus Circle, rain or shine, to hear some wonderful singing by our own singer YONA, and to celebrate the day and person whom we call our own. Bring your children as I bring mine. So they learn the importance of what we do to preserve our past so we have a better future.

Respectfully

Joe Gag

Joseph A. Guagliardo, CSE, CCD, CFE, CCEP, Ed.M

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