

NIAF New York Gala: An Extravagant Evening

Kayla Pantano (March 23, 2017)



The National Italian American Foundation's annual NYC Gala was a grand affair suffused with song, homage to heritage, and an abundance of food. Emceed by Joe Piscopo, the event successfully upheld the countless contributions made by the Italian American community. The following day, the NIAF Board of Directors gathered one last time under the chairmanship of Joseph V. Del Raso, and saw the election of Co-Chairs Patricia de Stacy Harrison and Gabriel A. Battista.

On March 22, the [National Italian American Foundation](#) [2] (NIAF) hosted its annual [New York Gala](#) [3] at [Cipriani 42nd Street](#) [4]. The event honored its mission of preserving and celebrating Italian heritage and culture, as well as promoting a positive image and legacy of Italian Americans. Throughout the evening guests had the opportunity to bid on silent auction items, enjoyed a three-course dinner, and took part in the Awards Program by listening to the inspirational words of the



2017 honorees.

The locale itself was enough to make it an affair for the books. Located in the heart of Manhattan, the Italian Renaissance inspired venue boasts elaborate inlaid floors, marble columns, high ceilings, red velvet drapery, and arresting chandeliers. Since bringing the event back to the beautiful Cipriani 42nd Street five years ago, it has consistently sold out and grown to be an anticipated staple of New York City's Italian community's social scene.

During the cocktail reception, guests were served Bellini, a mixture of Prosecco sparkling wine and peach purée, originally crafted in Venice. However, the open bar provided endless amounts of alternative drink concoctions. Of course, there was also a plethora of irresistible passed canapés. Before moving to the principal hall for dinner, attendees were able to view the sports memorabilia, fine jewelry, and glitzy women's designer purses that were among the many items being auctioned off.

Comedian [Joe Piscopo](#) [5] emceed the evening with a mix of humor, charm, and sincerity. After his warm welcome, [Christina Carlucci](#) [6] took the stage for a beautiful rendition of the Italian national anthem, followed by the exuberant [Jenna Esposito](#) [7], who received equal praise for her singing of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

And the music didn't stop there. The prized [Sicilian Tenors](#) [8] brought down the house, as their soaring voices floated through the space throughout their exciting performance. Later on, [Alfio](#) [9], an Italian singer-songwriter by way of Australia, failed to disappoint with the classics, working the stage and interacting with the audience. Listeners particularly enjoyed his take on the Sicilian folk song "Mi Voglio Maritare," clapping and singing along in unison.

While guests dined on baked taglioni with ham, Consul General Francesco Genuardi of Italy in New York addressed the crowd. He spoke with gratitude for the love and support Italy has received from Italian Americans and thanked NIAF for supporting Italy in earthquake relief. For the main entrée, attendees were treated to prime roast filet with herb mélange sauce served with potato tortino and a bundle of asparagus tied with leeks.

The 2017 Honorees

Each year, NIAF sets out to commemorate the best and brightest in business, sports, entertainment, and politics, and this occasion was no exception. The 2017 honorees demonstrate the diverse impact Italian Americans have here in the US and included the likes of: Managing Director of Goldman Sachs, [Anthony Cammarata Jr](#) [10].; [Shirley and Vernon Hill](#) [11], founders of InterArch and Metro Bank respectively; Jackson Lewis P.C., [Vincent A. Cino](#) [12]; Founder and Co-Managing Partner, SkyBridge Capital, [Anthony Scaramucci](#) [13]; and Cooking with Nonna host, [Rosella Rago](#) [14].

Cammarata is also a member of the Corporate Services and Real Estate global management team, responsible for overseeing the strategy, budget, and execution of a range of real estate operations and services for [Goldman](#) [15]. He received the Special Achievement Award in Business & Real Estate.

The Hills, who graced the NIAF red carpet with their beloved canine companion, Duffy, were recognized with the One America Award. Vernon is also the Founder of [Commerce Bank](#) [16] and is often credited with reinventing American banking. His wife, Shirley, does all of the architecture, design, branding and advertising for both of his banks.

As the Chairman of [Jackson Lewis P.C.](#) [17], Cino is responsible for the entire firm's day-to-day administration and management. Naturally, he received the Special Achievement Award in Law.

Scaramucci, an entrepreneur, financier, political figure, and author, who founded his own global alternative investment firm, expressed his thanks for his ancestry after receiving the Special Achievement Award in Business & Financial Services. "It has been the luckiest thing in my life to be born Italian, to grow up Italian, to have Italian grandparents, to eat Italian food, and to have the pride we all have."



Last but not least, Rago was honored with her Special Achievement Award in Community Leadership for her work in preserving Italian cooking. This award came one day after the release of her cookbook, [Cooking with Nonna](#) [18]. She put it beautifully when she said, "If there is one thing I've learned on this journey, it's this: we need our nonna's love and guidance now, more than ever, because as the world changes so rapidly around us, the values they teach us are timeless. Unlike the ingredients they cook with, these ladies have no expiration date."

Matilda Cuomo, wife of the late Mario Cuomo, was also in attendance. She was delighted to confer the third annual Mario M. Cuomo Award in Public Service to [Maria T. Vullo](#) [19], Superintendent of the New York State [Department of Financial Services](#) [20]. In her introduction, Cuomo stressed the importance of passing on Italian traditions to the younger generations. She said, "Tell your younger daughters and sons, nephews, and nieces, to push the Italian culture and Italian language. It is so beautiful."

In addition to the honorees, other notable guests included [Maria Bartiromo](#) [21] of [FOX Business Network](#) [22] and author of three books and [Kimberly Guilfoyle](#) [23], one of the co-hosts of [The Five](#) [24] on [Fox News Channel](#) [25].

The day after the gala, the [NIAF's Board of Directors](#) [26] met one last time under the chairmanship of [Joseph V. Del Raso, Esq.](#) [27], partner at [Pepper Hamilton LLP](#) [28]. [Patricia de Stacy Harrison](#) [29], President and CEO of the [Corporation for Public Broadcasting](#) [30] (CPB), and [Gabriel A. Battista](#) [31], former CEO of [Talk America Holdings Inc.](#) [32], were elected as Co-Chairs. All three have dedicated a great deal of their time and energy to the Italian American community, and the NIAF team looks forward to continued success in their service to Italian people everywhere.

[NIAF](#) [2] is a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., dedicated to preserving the heritage of Italian Americans. All proceeds from the evening will benefit the Foundation's philanthropic and educational programs.

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