

A Tavola! NOIAW Celebrates its 30th Anniversary with Lidia Bastianich

Marina Melchionda (June 23, 2010)



On June 10, 2010 the National Organization of Italian American Women celebrated its 30th Anniversary. Guests of honor were Lidia Bastianich and her family, "for being such an outstanding example of an Italian American family and for successfully promoting our heritage". For the occasion five young Italian-American women were awarded \$5,000 NOIAW scholarships as a contribution and encouragement to pursue their studies

June 10, 2010 is a date that will be remembered for a long time by those who were part of the celebrations for the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the [National Organization of Italian American Women](#) [2].

For the occasion Chair and Founder Aileen Riotto Sirey and Executive Director Maria Tamburri chose one of the most exclusive venues in Manhattan to welcome the more than one hundred attendees. The doors of the [Waldorf Astoria](#) [3] on Park Avenue opened to Italian-American VIPs and public personalities that have contributed, each in his own way, to the growth of the organization. Among them the former governor of the State of New York Mario Cuomo with his wife Matilda, the Consul



General of Italy in New York Francesco Maria Talò with his wife Ornella, and actors Joe Bologna and Renee Taylor.

Special guests for the evening were Hon. Antonio Tufano, National Vice President of [ANFE - Associazione Nazionale Famiglie Emigranti](#) [4], and the representatives of its Regional Delegation in Sicily, General Manager Gaetano Calà and General Assistant Manager Marco Scapagnini. The organization has recently welcomed a group of NOIAW members to Sicily and Rome, where some of them had the opportunity to visit their towns and territories of origins.

It is hard to summarize in one brief article the different moments that characterized this night of celebrations: the solemnity of the formally elegant decorations of the restaurant somehow contrasted with the familiar environment that surrounded us.

The Cocktail Terrace located on the 10th floor hosted the Silent Auction in which all sorts of merchandise were on display, from authentic Italian products to pictures, portraits, show tickets and voyages. Together with the Live Auction that took place later on in the evening, it is part of a general effort carried on by the organization to fund a whole range of programs, from the events involving all of its members and organized throughout the year to Cultural, Mentoring, Educational, and Exchange Programs aimed at supporting NOIAW's youngest members in continuing their education.

Auction time was the first occasion for us to meet old and new friends belonging to the organization. Among them, [Lidia Bastianich](#) [5] with her children Joe and Tanya and their families, and her mother Erminia Matticchio. The entire evening was dedicated to them "for the extraordinary contribution that they gave to the promotion of Italian culture in the US", as Mrs. Riggio suggested.

Lidia and her family founded and are carrying on a true family business in the US, according to the best Italian tradition. Aside from being a TV star and the host of shows such as Lidia's Italy, Lidia's Family Table, Lidia's Italian-American Kitchen, Lidia's Italian Table, and La Cucina di Lidia, she is also the author of several bestselling cookbooks, including Lidia Cooks from the Heart of Italy and Lidia's Italy.

She is the owner and chef of four renowned and high-range Italian restaurants in New York - [Felidia](#) [6], [Del Posto](#) [7], [Becco](#) [8] and [Esca](#) [9] - as well as "Lidia's" in [Pittsburgh](#) [10] and [Kansas City](#) [11].

Her son Joe is an internationally famous sommelier who, in partnership with chef [Mario Batali](#) [12], runs upscale restaurants in New York, Los Angeles and Las Vegas. He was recently honored by [Bon Appetit](#) [13] magazine with the "Outstanding Wine and Spirits Professional Award" and by the [James Beard Foundation](#) [14] in 2008.

Tanya runs the family travel agency, [Esperienze Italiane](#) [15], which focuses on Italian food, wine, and arts. She also oversees the development of Lidia's pasta and sauce product lines and has recently conceived a new house wares and cookware line that is soon to be launched.

Before the dinner featuring a menu conceived and prepared under her direction, Lidia signed copies of her book Lidia Cooks from the Heart of Italy, that was displayed in almost every corner of the elegant room. Her family's table occupied the area right before the central stage in the dining room: eleven places all together for her, Tanya and Joe with their husband and wife, five grandchildren, and His Excellency Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations Celestino Migliore, who found his place right next to Lidia.

Right before his blessing, singers [Cristina Fontanelli](#) [16] and [Giada Valenti](#) [17] sang respectively the US and Italian national anthems as a tribute to the two motherlands of the members of NOIAW.

It was time to finally taste Lidia's dinner... The three course menu was accompanied by a selection of wines from the [Bastianich vineyards](#) [18], located in the area of the Colli Orientali region of Friuli in Northeastern Italy, in the town of Buttrio and Premariacco, in the province of Udine, about one hour



from Venice.

Lidia's wines, that have received 5 "Tre Bicchieri" Awards from the [Gambero Rosso](#) [19] in the 7 years since the winery was founded, beautifully accompanied both the dishes Lidia decided to serve to the guests who came to celebrate her and her family.

A first dish of Crespelle stuffed with asparagus, spinach and ricotta cheese and baked in the oven with béchamel sauce preceded a second, very nourishing course: brasato with dark red ragu sauce accompanied with a side of potatoes and chard. "I wanted to offer something that the guests here would recognize as truly Italian. Oven baked pasta is a dish that Italian mothers usually prepare when they have to feed many people or a huge family, while the brasato is generally appreciated for its unique tenderness. The side dish is particularly dear to me, because my mother used to make it when I was very small and still lived on the other side of the ocean. She would say 'A tavola!' and we all ran to the kitchen" she told us.

As we were served the dessert, a Lemon Curd Tiramisu, it was time for Donna De Matteo, Chairwoman of the Scholarship Committee, to award the five winners of the NOIAW scholarships. Every year the organization selects five out of the numerous young women who apply to support them in pursuing their studies. This year's winners of a \$5.000 check were Emily Abraham (Law, Northern University); Ines De Meglio Cenatiempo (Spanish, BA, Sacred Heart University), Larissa Lury (Directing for Theatre, MFA, University of California), Lauren Mancia (History, Ph.D., Yale University), and Gabrielle A. Pati (Adolescent Education; Minor: Italian, Hunter College, CUNY).

The latter shared with us the emotions she felt for this important recognition: "As an Italian-American I have made the Italian language my field of study and I hope that one day I'll have the opportunity to teach it to the children of the future and open their mind and lives to such a wonderful culture as the Italian one is. I want to thank NOIAW for the important opportunity it is giving me to help me pursue my path."

It was finally time for Mrs. Riotto to present the award to the Bastianich family, "We are gratified to have Lidia as a Distinguished Member of our Board, and we honor the whole family for their success in promoting our heritage, for their generosity and for being such an outstanding example of an Italian American family", she said inviting the family to the podium.

This was, without a doubt, the most touching moment of our evening as Lidia's mother, Erminia, took the microphone and talked to a full audience in Italian. "I do not speak English that well: although I live in America since many years, I still remain a 100% Italian woman. Here in America, though, I found my happiness personified in my five great-grandchildren, a wonderful gift that my daughter Lidia and her son and daughter donated me."

It was with these words in our mind that we finally left the Waldorf Astoria. On that evening we not only celebrated NOIAW's 30th Anniversary, but also our Italian-American heritage, and our role as women to promote it and hand it down within our families - just as Lidia does with hers.

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