

NOIAW Celebrates Italian Family

Letizia Airos Soria (May 12, 2008)



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Last Sunday, in honor of its 28th anniversary, the National Organization of Italian American Women (NOIAW) celebrated family with a luncheon for one hundred guests in an incredible setting – Chelsea Pier 60 on the Hudson River.

Roseanne Colletti of WNBC played master of ceremonies, sharing the stage with many important guests throughout the evening. Some of the illustrious guests included Matilda Raffa Cuomo, Geraldine A. Ferraro, Francesco Maria Talò, Joan Roccasalvo, Joy Behar, Renee Taylor, and Joseph



Bologna. Particularly meaningful was the selection of the guests of honor: Rachael Ray and her mother, Elsa Scuderi, while Singers Cristina Fontanelli and Michael Amante provided a pleasant accompaniment to the event.

The Consul General Talò (Honorary Chair with his wife Ornella) underscored the important role of women in Italian-American history, from Mother Cabrini to Geraldine Ferraro. Family-education-management were the key words for Talò. He spoke of the importance of passing down identity through family, and how important communicating through the language of origin is today. For all these reasons, said the Consul, it is "important to promote the AP Italian program."

The founder and chairwoman, Aileen Riotto Sirey, surrounded by her granddaughters, and the President, Carol Silvagni MacLeod, summed up the journey of NOIAW and the importance of the role of Italian-American women today. Lots of reflection on the meaning of family took place at the luncheon, from table to table, between the various guests. Starting from those nearest and dearest to us we can work towards the future without forgetting the past. Donna de Matteo (NOIAW Scholarship Committee) presented Michelle Dutton, Susan Simone, Kristine V. Spano, Nicole Vidri, with this year's NOIAW scholarships.

The proceeds from the Sunday luncheon and a large auction will be used to raise the amount given out to deserving students. Also important is the work towards a cultural exchange with contemporary Italy, one of the organization's more recent objectives. Last year 18 Italian young women spent an intense and unforgettable time with Italian-American families. And this is the first step in a "circular dialogue" that NOIAW wants to keep increasing.

For almost thirty years NOIAW celebrates men and women of Italian origin and Rachael Ray and her mother Elsa Scuderi, received this important acknowledgment on Sunday.

Rachael Ray is an Emmy-nominated television star. Her magazine "Every Day", which enjoys a large readership, and her television program "30 minute Meals", are well known by many Americans. Through her Sicilian origins (Gela) she promotes a style of cooking that is inspired by Italian traditions, but simplified and made easier for everyone. Ray bases her recipes on natural ingredients and is known for forgoing the measuring cup.

Matilda Raffa Cuomo was moved as she remembered her Sicilian roots and her mother's dynamic personality. And "when I look at Rachael," she said "I'm like a notepad ready to take notes".

Geraldine Ferraro told of her emotional response after listening to the song "Mamma" sung by Michael Amante, and jokingly she said: "Enough of these Sicilians, let's celebrate Neapolitans!"

Rachael Ray's speech focused on her mother: "My work is her work, everything I do comes from her". She told the audience about how her mother had passed on to her the Italian spirit of a "good life", one not dependent on money. Her mother, she said, "made me understand how great it is to work and to respect all types of jobs." Elsa Scuderi told America Oggi about her first trip to Sicily and that her daughter had been surprised when she returned home with sand she had taken from the beach. Scuderi added, "I'm excited today, also because tomorrow is my husband's birthday!"



Among the luncheon's noteworthy guests were Mariuccia Zerilli-Marimo, Anthony J. Tamburri, Fred Gardaphe, Peter Carravetta, Marie Garibaldi, Angela Mazzarelli, Saliann Scarpulla, Patricia Lafreniere, Dominic Massaro, Joseph Sciame, Rosemarie Gallina-Santangelo, Christine Meola, and Bea Tusiani.

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