



Honoring Italian American Women at NOIAW's Annual Luncheon

Roberta Cutillo (April 16, 2019)



The Annual Luncheon of NOIAW, the National Organization of Italian American Women, was held on April 13th at the St. Regis Hotel in Manhattan, honoring the accomplishments of outstanding women and institutions, who contribute to the promotion and advancement of the Italian American culture and community.

This year's edition of the Annual [NOIAW](#) [2] Luncheon recognized the achievements of two remarkable Italian American Women, Sandra L. DePoalo (Global Head of Anti-Money Laundering) and Judith A. Salerno (President of the New York Academy of Medicine), as well as the [John D. Calandra Italian American Institute](#) [3], which received the Friend of NOIAW award.



As [Roma Torre](#) [4], award-winning TV news anchor, theatre critic and the event's emcee, remarked, "For nearly 39 years, NOIAW has remained steadfast in its mission of uniting, inspiring, celebrating, and empowering women through Italian heritage and culture." She thanked the organization, of which she is a member, for "having allowed me to connect with other Italian American women and reflect on my own legacy through my mother and my ancestry and how it impacted me personally and professionally."

Maria Tamburri, Chair of NOIAW's National Board of Directors, then came to the stage to thank this year's honorees, as well as the members of the board, and even members of the distinguished board, such as former first lady of the State of New York, founder of the Mentoring USA program, and founding member of NOIAW itself, [Matilda Cuomo](#) [5], who was present at the event, along with her daughter, [Dr. Margaret Cuomo](#) [6].

The Consul General of Italy, Francesco Genuardi, expressed his gratitude towards the organization and the work it does, acting as a "pillar for those nearly four million Italian Americans in the Tri-State area" and "a bridge between the generations, between the different layers of Italians and Italian Americans here."

Both honorees remembered the stories of their families, of how they came to the United States from Italy, facing hardships and working hard to ensure that their children and grandchildren would have a better life. Sandra DePoalo explained how, thanks to the example set by her parents and grandparents she and her brother "learned that through hard work, commitment, and our family's support, we can achieve anything that we put our hearts to."

She also stressed the importance of mentoring younger generations, stating that "There is no greater joy than seeing another young woman achieve more than she ever believed possible. And what NOIAW does through its mentoring program and through its scholarships reinforces that very same message."

The second honoree, Judith Salerno, also acknowledged the Italian American women who inspired her throughout her life, such as her mother, a child of Italian immigrants who, as the eldest, had to work to support her family and later to provide a better education and a better life for her own children, as well as her Italian grandmothers, with whom she shared a bedroom growing up, and whom she thanked for bravely crossing the Atlantic, thus providing their descendants with more opportunities for a better future.

It was then the turn of the Queens College (CUNY) John D. Calandra Italian American Institute to accept the 2019 Friend of NOIAW award. Founded in 1979 with the aim to redress imbalances in treatment of Italian Americans in higher education, the Institute now follows its mission to further explore and promulgate the experience and foster the education of and about Italian Americans throughout numerous activities.

Dr. Anthony Tamburri, the Dean of Calandra, stressed the importance of having the support of the community and of maintaining a dialog with Italy, through local Italian Institutions. "It's important for us to understand the Italy of the past through our own historical immigration experience, and it's



important for us to understand the Italy of the present with regarding what Italy is going through now with their own immigration issues," he stated.

Like every year, scholarships were then given out to six young Italian American women in order to support the studies they are carrying out across a variety of fields. Each of them had expressed what their Italian heritage means to them.

Finally, Torre concluded the event by asking everyone present, honorees and guests, to give themselves a round of applause for showing what it means to be true Italians, "shattering the awful stereotype that has too long dominated the perception of what it is to be Italian in this country."

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