



Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans

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Chicago's Italian American Community responds to Monuments Project

CHICAGO — The City of Chicago, in a release distributed on February 17, 2021, launched the Chicago Monuments Project website at chicagomonuments.org kicking off the public engagement phase of the Chicago Monuments Project.

The new website identifies monumental sculptures, artworks, and commemorative plaques on the public way and in Chicago parks selected by the Chicago Monuments Project Advisory Committee for further review.

Out of a collection of over 500 monumental sculptures and commemorative plaques on the public way and in Chicago parks, 41 have been deemed "controversial". Of those, three are statues of Christopher Columbus, one is the Italo Balbo monument in Grant Park.

The statues of Christopher Columbus represent generations of traditions celebrated by the Italian American community. In particular, the 129-year-old Columbus Statue, originally displayed at Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, that stood in Arrigo Park was financed, and fostered by Chicago's Italian American community. Led by State Representative Victor Arrigo and The Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans this statue was rededicated in Chicago's Little Italy 55 years ago.

In the interest of public safety, all three Columbus statues were removed this past summer and placed into storage "temporarily", according to Mayor Lightfoot. Now the fate of those monuments lies in the hands of this thirty-member commission.

"The history and traditions represented by these monuments are sacred to us Italian Americans. It is more than Columbus the man, his accomplishments or his intentions," said JCCIA President Ron Onesti. "I was married on Columbus Day. The Columbus Day Parade began its day each year with a wreath-laying ceremony at the feet of the Columbus Statue honoring Italian American War veterans. Joe DiMaggio even visited the statue!" Onesti said.

The monument honoring the transatlantic flight of Italo Balbo in 1933 to Chicago is of great concern to the Italian American community. It was a gift from Italy to Chicago and features a 2000-year-old column from ancient Rome.

"This is a time when the Italian American community of Chicago truly needs to come together, stand up, and be heard," said Onesti. He is asking all supporters to respond to the City of Chicago Monuments Project at www.chicagomonuments.org, click on the "Share Your Thoughts" button, then scroll down to the "Public Feedback" section.

"The Columbus and Balbo statues are public expressions of our Italian immigrant heritage, culture, and pride. This is something very important to our community, and we just want the same respect any other ethnic group would be afforded," Onesti said.