



Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans

3800 Division Street, Stone Park, Illinois 60165

Phone: (708) 450-9050

Fax: (708) 450-9065

www.jccia.com

jcc@jccia.com

Ron Onesti, President
Jo Ann Serpico, Exec. Director
Lisa Ryan, 1st V.P.
Salvatore Camarda, 2nd V.P.
Lyn Sclaro, 3rd V.P.
Stan Kuczynski, Secretary
Christine C. Cerami, Treasurer
Frank Di Piero, Sgt. at Arms
Frank Sommario, Legal Advisor
Sergio Giangrande, Past President
Rose Mary Ranallo, President, WD
Pasquale Gianni, President, Avanti

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

American Assoc. of Italian Teachers
Arcolian Dental Society
Assoc. Regionale Siciliana (ARSA)
Associazione Veneti nel Mondo
Blush, Inc.
Calabresi in America
Casa Italia
Chicagoland IA Professionals
CIACO
Columbian Club
Elk Grove Village Sister Cities
First Nations Bank
Flowers of Italy
Fra Noi
Hardcore Italians
Harlem Ave Little Italy Bus. Assoc.
Italidea Midwest
Italo National Union Foundation
IA Civic Organization of Berwyn
IA Exec of Transportation (IAET)
IA Human Relations Foundation
IA Political Coalition
IA Veterans Museum
IA Veterans Posts/Auxiliaries 1, 2, 4
IA Women's Organization
ISDA St. Anthony Lodge #13
Ital. Catholic Federation 392
Italo National Union IANU
JCCIA Women's Division
JCCIA Avanti Club
JRC Investments, Inc.
Justinian Society of Lawyers
Little Italy Chicago (LICNA)
Marchegiana Society
Maria SS. Lauretana Society
Mazzini Verdi Club
National IA Sports Hall Of Fame
Old Neighborhood IA Club
Panoramus
San Francesco Di Paola
San Giovanni Bosco
San Rocco Di Potenza
Sicilian American Cultural Assoc.
Society of OLMC
Shrine Our Lady of Pompeii
Società Beato Giovanni Liccio
Società Santa Fara di Cinisi
Sons and Daughters of Italy
SS. Maria di Costantinopoli
Unico Chicago West Suburban

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 8, 2022

Please contact: media@jccia.com

Italian American Community response to Chicago Monuments & Memorials Commission

CHICAGO: In response to the notice of the Commission's intentions, we must say that we are appalled at the intended outcome! Since this Commission's inception, there have been predetermined notions on the future of specific "problematic" monuments in Chicago. Futile community engagements ensued as the positions that agreed with Commission members were fostered, while opposing opinions were disregarded. Any body that is to truly represent the wishes of the people should begin with an impartial foundation that weighs all the information, perspectives, and social effects of the initiative. This has not been the case here.

Chicago's Italian American Community is a large constituency that has contributed greatly to the City of Chicago. Our community has made it quite clear that the removal of the Christopher Columbus statues and the impending removal of the Italo Balbo monument is something deeply hurtful to us and an insult to our heritage and contributions to this great City.

Our ties to these monuments are profound:

- The Chicago 1892 (93) Columbian Exposition World's Fair Columbus Statue and Columbus Plaza in Arrigo Park where it sat was installed October 12, 1966. In 1973 the Columbus Statue Committee paid the Park District just over \$10,000 additionally as a contribution to maintain the statue in perpetuity.
- The Chicago 1933 Century of Progress World's Fair Columbus Statue in Grant Park was paid for by the Italian American Community
- The Italo Balbo Monument in Grant Park consists of a column that is approximately 2,000 years old dating from between 117 and 38 BC. It was taken from an ancient port town outside of Rome and gifted to the city of Chicago in 1933 to honor the trans-Atlantic flight led by Italo Balbo to the Century of Progress World's Fair.
- The Balbo monument is truly incredible as it was part of the Roman Empire over two thousand years ago.
- The Drake Fountain Columbus Statue was also a gift to the city in 1892 to commemorate the 400th Anniversary of Columbus' voyages.

These are four relics of great historic significance. And the stories that surround them have varied perspectives. Removing these monuments would also tear down the history and traditions of generations of Chicagoans of Italian ancestry.

A vast majority of members of the Commission, while representing a fair cross-section of our culturally diverse City, have been vocal about their firm stance against the Columbus and Balbo monuments since day one. However, the members of the community at large who participated in the community engagement part of the process were



Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans

3800 Division Street, Stone Park, Illinois 60165

Phone: (708) 450-9050

Fax: (708) 450-9065

www.jccia.com

jcc@jccia.com

Ron Onesti, President
Jo Ann Serpico, Exec. Director
Lisa Ryan, 1st V.P.
Salvatore Camarda, 2nd V.P.
Lyn Scolaro, 3rd V.P.
Stan Kuczynski, Secretary
Christine C. Cerami, Treasurer
Frank Di Piero, Sgt. at Arms
Frank Sommario, Legal Advisor
Sergio Giangrande, Past President
Rose Mary Ranallo, President, WD
Pasquale Gianni, President, Avanti

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

American Assoc. of Italian Teachers
Arcolian Dental Society
Assoc. Regionale Siciliana (ARSA)
Associazione Veneti nel Mondo
Blush, Inc.
Calabresi in America
Casa Italia
Chicagoland IA Professionals
CIACO
Columbian Club
Elk Grove Village Sister Cities
First Nations Bank
Flowers of Italy
Fra Noi
Hardcore Italians
Harlem Ave Little Italy Bus. Assoc.
Italidea Midwest
Italo National Union Foundation
IA Civic Organization of Berwyn
IA Exec of Transportation (IAET)
IA Human Relations Foundation
IA Political Coalition
IA Veterans Museum
IA Veterans Posts/Auxiliaries 1, 2, 4
IA Women's Organization
ISDA St. Anthony Lodge #13
Ital. Catholic Federation 392
Italo National Union IANU
JCCIA Women's Division
JCCIA Avanti Club
JRC Investments, Inc.
Justinian Society of Lawyers
Little Italy Chicago (LICNA)
Marchegiana Society
Maria SS. Lauretana Society
Mazzini Verdi Club
National IA Sports Hall Of Fame
Old Neighborhood IA Club
Panoramus
San Francesco Di Paola
San Giovanni Bosco
San Rocco Di Potenza
Sicilian American Cultural Assoc.
Society of OLMC
Shrine Our Lady of Pompeii
Società Beato Giovanni Liccio
Società Santa Fara di Cinisi
Sons and Daughters of Italy
SS. Maria di Costantinopoli
Unico Chicago West Suburban

overwhelmingly in favor of telling history and not removing monuments that tell the stories.

We do not believe that the process by which monuments and artwork is to be determined, displayed, or removed has truly been vetted. The actual process, while including a few community engagement sessions, was very informal and in no way had any component of discovery of factual data to support a decision of this magnitude.

There are authors and scholars who do not support this Commission's unfairly negative views on Christopher Columbus and Italo Balbo. **You are infringing on the rights of the Italian American Community by giving in to pressures that are not based on history or supported by fact. This is not how government should work.**

Everyone agrees that the narrative needs to be broadened. Let those broader stories be told by accompanying plaques, website additions, special events and social media posts. We want that to happen and want to be a part of that process. We would hope the Commission would assume that responsibility. In a society where the word "inclusion" is king, the words "removal" and "revision" should not prevail without due process and substantiation of the facts.

In the words of philosopher George Santayana ("The Life of Reason," 1905), *"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."*

Your intentions are not acceptable to the Italian American Community, and they will set a dangerous precedent for all the people of Chicago if you go forth with the removal of these monuments. It is an infringement on our rights as Americans and on our right of free speech.

"Tyranny of the minority" must end. Democracy and majority rule must be restored. We are respectfully but adamantly asking the Commission to reconsider its position.

Respectfully,

Ron Onesti, President, Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans
Alderman Nick Sposato, Chicago 38th Ward Alderman
and Monuments and Memorials Commission Member
Sergio Giangrande, Immediate Past President, JCCIA
and Monuments and Memorials Commission Member
Anthony J. Onesto, JCCIA Legal Counsel
Frank Sommario, JCCIA Legal Counsel
Enrico Mirabelli, JCCIA Legal Counsel

JCCIA is a 501c3 organization and a Congress of over fifty Italian American Organizations in the Chicago area