

From the NIAF Chairman



Growing up in South Philadelphia during the 1950s and 1960s, music was an integral part of my life. Like every other young man my age, I belonged to a four-man singing group — we called ourselves “We Four” — and emulated singing groups like Danny and the Juniors, the Four Aces and the Four Freshmen. Fabian, Frankie Avalon, and Bobby Rydell were my neighbors, classmates and team mates; they had already made it. Fourteen of the fifteen above mentioned performers were Italian Americans.

Even as a teenager, the Italian American contribution to music was not lost on me. And at its helm was always Frank Sinatra, the “Chairman of the Board.” His successes were shared by all Italian Americans; it was a great source of pride that this son of Sicilian and Genovese immigrants was succeeding, particularly following anti-Italian sentiments stirred in this country by World War II.

In this issue, on the 10-year anniversary of his death, we take a look at what Sinatra’s life and accomplishments meant to Italians and Italian Americans. University professors, performers, noted author Gay Talese, and Sinatra’s wife of 22 years, Barbara, all give us their take on how this man’s achievements and failures paved the way for Italian Americans.

I’d also like to call your attention to the article in this issue about NIAF member Paul Minolfo, “Remembering Bosco Salice.” Paul and I have long been friends, so I was particularly moved to recently learn of his time spent as a

child in a Fascist internment camp in Italy during World War II and his later service in the U.S. Army in Belgium — a topic he did not divulge until recently, when an Italian professor wrote a book on the subject and profiled his family. Now Paul hopes to share his experiences with others.

Like Paul, another longtime friend and colleague, NIAF Chairman Emeritus Frank J. Guarini, also served in World War II, returning to a life of public service inspired by the American values of freedom and opportunity that he fought so hard to protect overseas. On page 41, NIAF Public Policy Director John Marino examines the far-reaching legacy of Guarini’s career and his role in shaping his hometown, Jersey City, New Jersey, into a gleaming symbol of prosperity.

Frank Sinatra, Paul Minolfo and Frank Guarini are part of what Tom Brokaw termed “the greatest generation.” Their achievements and visions for equality and opportunity in this country paved the way for today’s generation of Italian American successes. So, when NIAF representatives gathered this June in Rome and Milan for a series of conferences on economic cooperation, as detailed on page 6, their exchange was made possible in part by the past achievements of these three great Italian Americans.

As always, I thank you for your support of NIAF. I encourage you to attend this year’s Anniversary Convention and Gala on October 17–18 in Washington, D.C.

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