

AGM Speaking points November 25th, 2018

Good afternoon, Buon pomeriggio. Welcome to the Annual General meeting e Elezione for the National Congress of Italian Canadians. It is wonderful to see so many out here this afternoon, an assembly of individual members of the Congress , and Presidents and or designates of the many associations .

Buon giorno e benvenuti a tutti in particolare ai nuovi membri e alle nuove associazioni che si sono unite a noi negli ultimi mesi.

I don't want to take up too much of your time as I know that we all would like to go home to cheer on the Ottawa RedBlacks as they bring the Grey Cup home(I love parades and if they win, there will be one on Tuesday) but it is incumbent on me to present a President's Report to you on behalf of the Congresso.

It is hard to believe that two short years ago, this new Congresso set about with a very heavy heart but a load of goodwill, as we put the final touches to our Fundraiser Brunch, held to raise relief monies for the victims of the August 2016 earthquake. The community rallied and that

afternoon, with over 350 people in attendance, supported by so many of our associations and friends, we were able to raise close to \$14,000.00 that was in turn presented to the Red Cross to be used for medical equipment, basic survival gear and the reconstruction of an area known by so many in our community.

Two years ago, when I ran for the position of President, I ran along the lines of making the Congress matter and count in our community.

The Congresso and only the Congresso, despite claims to the contrary, represents 1.4 million Canadians nationwide and about 45K here in Ottawa, and since 1974, has been recognized by the Government of Canada. The Congress has been the SINGLE, UNITED VOICE of matters important to the Italian Canadian community. Our challenge has been to make this community A united GROUP, NOT led by one person or persons. Natural Disasters such as an earthquake, the internment of Italian Canadians, and the declaration of Ontario Heritage Month in 2010 are some of the examples in which the Congress has been able to champion alongside other important major associations. Our local district was

privileged to have been side by side and to help move forward Private Members motion, M-64, sponsored by MP Deb Schulte to mark Italian Heritage Month countrywide. We were honoured to have been asked to witness the vote in the House of Commons gallery as this motion was unanimously passed. Ms. Schulte remains a friend to this day and has attended a few of our events.

This was an example of one of the many events that the NCIC has helped sponsor over these last two years. One thing that our Executive Board prides itself on is the relationship and collaboration with so many of our Italian Canadian associations who belong to our Board of Directors. We have developed great friendships and working relationships with individuals, associations and institutions and we have always been present to participate in a variety of community initiatives. Our representatives have been present to many a dinner dance, picnic, concert, movie nights and many more that showcase our great cultural traditions, those going back many years that remain a very important component to our community. We look forward to the next few years in having a continued presence at so many activities.

In 2017, the year that celebrated the 150th birthday of both the City of Ottawa and Canada, The NCIC developed a theme of Preserving our Past , Enriching Our Future. The Congress invited local journalist and historian Phil Jenkins to present a history of the Italian community in Ottawa. Two weeks later, curator Mauro Perressini of the Canadian Museum of History, visited the Historical Centre to discuss the importance of sharing our past stories, chronicling our history and how you as a community, either as an individual or an association, can become involved in this ongoing project. This partnership formed with the Museum in ongoing and Mauro is willing to return at our request to continue this discussion. The importance of cultivating relationships like this can not be underestimated. Other connections have been made with the City of Ottawa archives, Casa d'Italia in Montrea, the Historical Society of Ottawa and Heritage Ottawa to name but a few. The Congress has become the Ottawa chapter of the ICAP(Italian Canadian Archival Project). These relationships allow the NCIC to network with like minded associations and individuals whereby we can share mutual activities and learning opportunities. in 2019, the

ICAP conference will be held at Brock University in St. Catherines and we look forward to taking part in that informative weekend. In spring 2018, we were pleased to be the recipient of a small City of Ottawa Heritage Grant to continue with our project of recording the oral and written history of our community. With some of those monies, we purchased a small camcorder for that purpose. We welcome some input as to those in the community that would be willing to partake in this project.

Returning to collaborations within our community-many of our collaborative events have taken place right here at the Centro Storico. Working alongside many of these groups such as the Societa Dante Aligheri, Fogolar Furlan, Societa Sicula, CIBPA, Parolissima, Centro Giovanile Formativo, Villa Marconi , Comites di Ottawa to name a few , provides a richness of programming that upholds the cultural mandate of the Congress as well as contributing to the tapestry of our great community. Over these last couple of years, and averaging close to 2 events per month, we have welcomed approximately 1000 people to cross the threshold of the Centro Storico. It is my belief that this room, this venue, has now become the

cultural hub of the community. This room that belongs to you, the community-not to a group but to you and we welcome your ideas for possible upcoming events. The Culture Committee , led so ably by Francesco Loriggio, has put in many hours in planning these cultural activities. Francesco is stepping aside from the day to day life of a Board member but has offered his services as an ad hoc advisor. This is something we offer so if you are interested in joining us in this way but cannot commit to being a full time member of the Board, please advise us. There is a place for all.

I would also like to thank Antonio Cellucci for his ongoing technical help and advice.

With a roster of dedicated volunteers from members associations, we have been able to stage art exhibits featuring local artists, Cultural Salons coordinated by the Dante, with interesting speakers like the one held this past Wednesday, presenting Rosemaria Durand and her book *The Basta Basta Kitchen* and hosted by local CBC radio personality Giacomo Panico.

Exhibitions range from model airplanes and ships to creative drawings from the youth of our

community showcase the richness that is so omnipresent. Books and Biscotti, a nationwide annual literary event, has been here, bringing together many Italian Canadian writers from Coast to coast, reading from their latest works. We have been fortunate to work alongside the Association of Italian Canadian Writers and their recent anthology of Canadian writing entitled People, Places, Passages. We have been very appreciative of the support of the Writers Union and the League of Poets to be able to host the many literary events.

One of our most valued partners is Villa Marconi. In March 2017, we partnered with them in staging the delicious Assaggi. Their staff has been most open, and accommodating on a daily basis and for that we thank you. (Check for reps in the crowd) We thank Domenic Ricci for his many years of service to the community. As well, we have made the residents of Villa aware of the many activities in this room and have made it possible for many to attend alongside their families. This is something so very important and enriching to us all.

In collaboration with the Embassy of Italy, and other associations , the Centro has also been the

venue for many a movie night. With our newly installed AV system, we can have a fully functional centre to host many an event. Movies shown over the last couple of years range from Piazza Petawawa in collaboration with CIBPA Ottawa, a film dealing with the internment of Italian Canadians during the Second World War. Many came away from that film with a greater understanding of this dark chapter in Canada's history but still a question as to how it happened. Film makers, both Canadian and international, graced our doorstep, with provocative and heartfelt films and documentaries. We showcased Blaxploitation, and L'Attesa on successive nights in the fall of 2017, working alongside the Dante and the Embassy. Many activities taking place during the Settimana della Lingua Italiana in mondo (October) and Settimana della Cucina di Mondo (November) have been co-sponsored and held here, dealing with the culinary traditions of the Friuli and the past mentioned Basta Basta: Sicily at the Table marking this year's theme of the Mediterranean Diet.

I mention working together a lot-it is so important to showcase this for the benefit of the community. I wish to acknowledge the important relationship

with both the Comites di Ottawa, led by Cavaliere Francesco Di Candia and his Executive as well as the Embassy of Italy, headed up by Ambasciatore Claudio Taffuri and Consigliere Spartaco Caldararo, a familiar face here over this last year. The Embassy have been most supportive of our activities and have been most generous and for that we thank you.

Going back to the Comites and the positive relationship between both our groups. Two weeks ago, we partnered with the Comites, Societa Sicula and the Embassy for our second annual Remembrance Day Commemoration Ceremony. It truly was a touching afternoon as we remembered the sacrifice of so many. We were honoured to have Orazio Rizzi present a moving history of the 100th anniversary of the end of WW1 as well as being able to screen the film Fango e Gloria. Close to 100 people were in attendance that afternoon. In 2017, the Congress paid homage, at their first Remembrance Day ceremony, to a young Ottawa Italian Canadian, Lance Corporal Antonio Barbaro. We were honoured to have the presence Corporal Barbaro's family and to be able to pay proper respect of this young man's unwavering bravery.

Speaking of movies, This year, as well, allowed the Congress to partner alongside the Comites, The Embassy, the Dante and CIBPA to have the first ever ICFE Ottawa. Two nights in mid June , 4 films shown at Cineplex Lansdowne, generated a lot of interest, and we look forward to being able to make this happen again this coming year. It was my privilege to attend the opening ICFE press conference in Toronto in mid May alongside Anna Chiappa of the Dante Aligheri Society.

One of the first items we tackled upon taking office was the amendment of the governing constitution and bylaws of this local chapter of the Congress. Listening to the community and its misgivings with certain articles, we set about making changes. Under the tutelage of two Board Members who comprised the Bylaws Committee, First VP Michael Aquilino and Director Lorenzo Bonera, a new and updated document was produced and presented at a members meeting last February. It was adopted unanimously and Michael will touch upon this in a short time. We also set up three other sub committees, focusing on Culture(led by FL), Communications(led by CML) and the Historical Centre(Led by CN).

Communications Committee has been working on an updated website that is up and running under the new address of ncicottawa.com. Here you will find information dealing with our chapter, as well as the community calendar, upcoming events etc. We welcome your input and suggestions. Our past webmaster Giorgio Zanetti and our current one Ryan Ricci deserve our great thanks for their ongoing work and dedication over the last number of years. However we are losing Ryan from our committee so if there is someone out there who has this technical expertise, please come and see us. One of our projects forthcoming will be the production of a newsletter and this is where we too will welcome contributions. Activities of the many associations, stories of individuals etc can be shared via this medium. Media dissemination is so important and when one is faced with challenges with certain community media, we need to develop another way to share our stories, events etc. We would love to hear from you with ideas for possible activities. In this day of 24/7 omnipresent communication, the Congress believes strongly in getting its information out there. We are not a top down organization but one that believes in hearing from their membership and is always open to discussing your ideas.

As you know, many of our activities take place at the Historical Centre, right here in this room. To ensure that this continues, we from time to time ask for your help. To upkeep this Centro requires financial resources, most of it for ongoing maintenance and an annual payment to VM and for insurance coverage. To be able to continue our programming , we need your ongoing support. That is why you will see a free will contribution jar at our events. For those donations, past and future, we thank you. When the Centro opened in 2013, the donor wall was inaugurated, The brass plaques up there record the many families and individuals who came to Canada for a better life and helped contribute to the richness of our community. The plaques were a way to mark that families contribution, These plaques are still an ongoing fundraiser and one can be purchased for \$500.00. A tax receipt is available for that. The fee can be paid as either a one time cost or in two installments, over the course of a year, to make it affordable for all. There is also a donor wall for the associations. If you have any questions, Corrado Nicastro will be pleased to provide you with any information. As well , the Congress wishes to thank all those that attended and supported our

May fundraiser where we honoured our lifetime friend Nello Bortolotti. For that, we are forever grateful. Nello's history was closely tied to the Congress and to the NCIC Foundation, where he loved being a large part of the annual Giovanni Caboto Awards set to take place this spring. In referencing the Foundation, stay tuned for news from their Interim President Joe Macaluso as to membership and elections to their Board. (Steven Travale)

In closing and in mentioning Nello, we cannot forget his passing a few short months ago in Sept. This past year has also seen our community lose so many passionate leaders who truly supported the NCIC and the Centro, leaders like Italo Tiezzi, Giovanna Panico, Lucio Appoloni and Dario Catana who acted as an advisor on our Centro Storico committee. As well, we lost a few individuals who carried a Congress membership and attended a few of our events.

I would like to take this time to thank the community media for advertising and covering our events-Tele 30, CHIN Radio 97.9, OMNI TV and David Battistelli and L'Ora di Ottawa.

A President goes nowhere without a wonderful group of teammates, people who keep the Congress functioning on a daily basis, and that I have in a great Executive and a Board of Directors made up of the Presidents of the Associations who take out membership in the Congress. I would like for the Executive Members of the Congress to stand and be acknowledged. I thank them for their support over these last two years and in moving forward. I would also like to thank their families who share their loved ones with us and who are often here lending a hand. This time can never be measured and is valued immensely. I wish to thank all the members and associations for their ongoing support. Grazie per il vostro sostegno. I would also like to point out that in April, at the National Congress (national level) Biennial convention, both Lorenzo Bonera and I became members of the National Executive, Lorenzo as Treasurer and myself as the Second VP. We also hold a place on the executive of the NCIC Ontario District.

In closing a quote that I follow from time to time and one that led me to take up the challenge of being President of the Congress during a very tumultuous time in our community-

"What if I fall? Oh, but my darling, what if you Fly?

And I think we have flown and will continue to do so, but only with your help.....

Thank you...