

Fighting the Good Fight

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AP Italian. Where we stand, what we could do. An interview with Arthur Piccolo.

As is well known to our readers, starting from this year the Advanced Placement exam in Italian, which was administered for the first time in 2006, has been cancelled.

The Advanced Placement Program in Italian is a high school-level exam that allows those who pass it to receive credits from most colleges in the U.S., thus potentially saving students a few thousands dollars for college credit for an advanced course in Italian.

The exam is managed nationally by the College Board, a not-for-profit organization. Just three years since its inception, the College Board declared that Advanced Placement Program in Italian had failed to attract enough students to justify its costs; they requested an endowment of \$11.5 million in order to resume the AP Program in Italian.

In a generous effort to save the AP in Italian, in the past year several Italian and Italian/American Organizations mobilized. The Italian Embassy in Washington and the Consulate General of Italy in New York were among those in the forefront of this struggle, together with the American Association of Teachers of Italian (AATI) and the then newly created Italian Language Foundation, to raise the necessary funds.

These efforts were unsuccessful, however, and the situation is at a stand-still. Recently, the AATI called a meeting of the major national Italian/American associations for later this month.

In this broad context, a most recent initiative by Mr. Arthur Piccolo merits some attention. In a recent email, Mr. Piccolo clearly expressed his desire to “discourage our Italian/American community to give into” the College Board’s “blackmail.” He argued that not one penny should be given to them to save AP Italian. “Shame on us if we give into this ransom demand” the letter says.

Mr. Piccolo is disappointed by the fact that some Italian Americans may actually be taking the College Board’s demand seriously. “Although they will never really raise \$11.5 Million to give to The College Board—the idea they would even try is disappointing to me as one Italian American. (...) Imagine what our community could do with \$11.5 Million to promote the Italian language in America, and to reward those who pursue the learning of Italian. With \$11.5 Million to spend properly Italian in the next decade will rise to levels never seen before. And millions of Americans who never would have learned to speak and read Italian will.”

So what would Mr Piccolo suggest that we do? i-Italy has reached Mr Piccolo and asked just that. Here is his initial response...

The College Board has canceled the Advanced Placement Program in Italian after only three years since its inception. In your opinion, what effect does this have on Italian?

The College Board and its Advance Placement exam is the academic standard by which languages are judged. Not being an AP language in so many words labels a language that is not included a “minor” language. The overall impact is to discount the importance in Italian. Making it less important to school systems around the nation to provide courses in Italian. Making it less attractive for students to learn, and undermining the efforts of the Italian American community to increase interest in what is a very important European language.

Also, what message does this cancellation send? Better still, what has been the message the first fifty-one years when the only Advanced Placement programs in languages were in French, German, and Spanish?

The point of my speaking out as one interested and proud Italian American is that after doing some research and validating my concerns, I have no doubt that the College Board is actively involved in institutional discrimination against Italian. There is no reason why Italian was excluded when Advance Placement exams first began in the 1950s, and currently The College Board's position that in effect they must make money if they are to provide the AP exam in Italian is a blatant misuse of their educational charter issued them by the Regents of New York State and the New York State Education Department.

If you had your druthers, what would you require of the College Board?

I see a clear path here for our Italian American community. First of all, we must completely and categorically reject The College Board demand for \$11.5 Million to reinstate the AP exam in Italian. That is nothing more than a blatant shakedown. Italian Americans need to know The College Board, a not-for-profit organization, consistently makes close to \$500M or more in assets and profits annually after all its operational costs and all its testing is paid for [Ed. note: IRS Form 990, Line 21, net assets... \$436,258,166 as of 2007]. Even worse, contrary to the very concept behind the IRS providing them 501(C)3 status, which relieves them of any taxes, they must spend their resources on their stated purpose. Instead, believe it or not, The College Board is sitting on over \$500 Million in



assets ONE HALF BILLION DOLLARS. Yet they claim they cannot afford to administer the AP exam for Italian. It is time that our Italian American leaders took the College Board to court and exposed this charade, demanding the immediate reinstatement of the Italian AP exam, and seeking multi-million dollar damages for over 50 years of undermining the teaching and learning of Italian language in the United States. It is time to fight for what we believe in and all that Italian Americans have contributed to our nation for 400 years, now beginning with Albiano Lupo in 1610 arriving in Jamestown, Virginia, and Pietro Alberti arriving in New Amsterdam, now New York City, in 1635.

Arthur Piccolo is founder and chairman of the Bowling Green Association in Lower Manhattan and has been active in the Italian American community for many years. Currently he is promoting an ambitious 10 year project labeled The Alberti Project, to make the Italian language the equal of both French and German within the United States.

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