



At Cipriani 42nd St. with Friends and Supporters of the National Italian American Foundation

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Government Officials, Industry Leaders, TV Journalist honored in New York City. Governor Cuomo joined the more than 500 guests to present the inaugural Mario M. Cuomo Award in Public Service to Janet DiFiore

New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, business executives, Italian American community leaders, friends and supporters of the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) gathered in Manhattan for the Foundation's annual New York Spring Gala on April 8, 2015.



During the cocktail reception, guests were served the famous Bellini cocktail under the towering marble columns at the Italian Renaissance-inspired Cipriani 42nd Street. They also viewed the sports memorabilia, fine jewelry and designer women's purses that were part of the silent auction.

NIAF's Chairman Joseph V. Del Raso welcomed everyone to the Foundation's dinner. "Tonight we celebrate NIAF's 40th Anniversary to begin on April 26. It is my honor to unveil the Italian American Leadership Council (IALC) for members to commit themselves to being leaders and stakeholders in NIAF, the Italian American community and our future. Join us in this endeavor," Del Raso said. Besides welcoming honorees and guests, Del Raso introduced Bishop Frank Joseph Caggiano of the Diocese of Bridgeport who gave the invocation.

Governor Cuomo joined the more than 500 guests to present the inaugural Mario M. Cuomo Award in Public Service to Janet DiFiore, the Westchester County, N.Y., district attorney. The award recognizes Italian American public servants who are known for their passion, conviction and dedication to serving the Italian American community.

At the podium, Cuomo spoke about his father's legacy. "My father was dedicated to represent the best of the Italian American people and he wanted to model the best of the Italian American culture," Cuomo said. "He led a life of principle, dignity and honor. He was about honor and commitment and living up to his word."

DiFiore thanked Governor Cuomo for taking the time to be at the NIAF Gala. "This evening is about scholarship and education. Thank you for the fight for quality education and educational opportunities for every child in the State of New York," DiFiore said. "Mario Cuomo is a model, the most cherished Italian American to call our own."

New York Gala dinner chairman Gerard S. LaRocca, a member of NIAF's Board of Directors and the Italian American Leadership Council, and chief administrative officer, Americas, Barclays Capital, thanked the Foundation's New York committee for rebuilding the NIAF New York Gala into the institution it is today.

LaRocca was joined by this year's master of ceremonies, Chazz Palminteri, Academy-Award nominated actor and writer, who was warmly welcomed by the guests. "As you may recall, I, too was a NIAF New York Gala honoree in the recent past. This is a great organization that does a great deal for the Italian American community. I am proud to be a supporter," Palminteri said.

Before the guests dined on Italian specialties, including thinly sliced prosciutto with fresh mozzarella and roasted pear and frisee salad, Christina Carlucci, a New York City based performer, recently in the national tour of "Annie," sang the United States national anthem and "Inno di Mameli," Italy's national anthem.

After dinner was served, Palminteri opened the awards ceremony with a posthumous honor for WABC 7's Lisa Colagrossi, Emmy Award-winning reporter, whose sudden passing in mid-March has greatly affected the Italian American community in New York. Her colleague at WABC-TV Ken Rosato accepted the award on behalf of her family. "I accept this award on behalf of our beloved colleague and will present it to her husband Todd and the boys upon their return from Florida visiting family," Rosato said.

Rosato, Channel 7's anchor at Eyewitness News This Morning and Eyewitness News at Noon, was



also honored with the NIAF Special Achievement Award in Media. Rosato, a veteran news reporter, received the New York Emmy Award five times and is a recipient of a New York State-Associated Press Award. He joined WABC's Eyewitness Team as a freelance reporter 12 years ago and has worked in media markets, including Elmira-Binghamton, N.Y. and Miami-Ft. Lauderdale. A graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts with a Master of Arts in languages, Rosato speaks five languages fluently, including Spanish and Italian.

A dual father-and-son award in real estate was presented to Edward A. Riguardi and Peter G. Riguardi. NIAF recognized Edward Riguardi's more than 50-year career in commercial real estate. Edward retired in 2010 as managing director in the New York Transaction Group of Jones Lang LaSalle. His son Peter is president of the New York region of Jones Lang LaSalle and leads all operations for the company in the New York, New Jersey and the Connecticut area, overseeing a team of approximately 1,700 professionals.

NIAF recognized their careers in the industry with the Foundation's Special Achievement Award in Real Estate. "They represent the family success that all Italian Americans aspire to," said Palminteri.

"These five honorees and their stories are a testament to why we gathered here tonight and telling their stories is the core of NIAF's mission," Palminteri added.

NIAF's President and Chief Operating Officer John M. Viola introduced special guest Piero Corsini, director of RAI World, who travelled from Rome, Italy, to present a video about the new channels and initiatives the media company has launched to showcase Italians and Italian Americans in Italy and abroad.

Joining the honorees and guests were Italy's Consul General in New York Natalia Quintavalle; actor Ralph George Macchio Jr., best known for his roles in the "Karate Kid," and "My Cousin Vinny"; Miss New York Jillian Tapper; television news host Tom Murro; athletic director at Sacred Heart University and former manager of the New York Mets Bobby Valentine; the Region of Lombardia's Education Training and Employment Assessor Valentina Aprea, with representatives from Italy's Lombardy region, NIAF 2015 Region of Honor; as well as NIAF's vice presidents in the Greater New York region Susan Paolercio and Nicholas R. Caiazzo.

To close the evening's festivities, Alfio, Italian-Australian vocalist, came to the stage and performed the melodramatic Italian ballad "Il Mondo." Several guests danced in the aisles as he continued to sing Italian melodies.

The NIAF New York Spring Gala proceeds support the Foundation's philanthropic and educational programs. NIAF thanks this year's Presenting Sponsors Jones Lang LaSalle and the Viola Foundation Inc.

The National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the heritage of Italian Americans. Visit www.niaf.org [2]

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