

Special Guests and Surprises at AIAE's 22nd Annual Ceremony

I. I. (May 02, 2019)



The Association of Italian American Educators celebrated their 22nd Annual Awards and Scholarships Ceremony at the Consulate General of Italy in New York on May 3rd, 2019. This year's honorees included i-Italy's very own Founder and Editor-in-Chief, Letizia Airos, who along with Cav. Giulio Picolli, Prof. Massimo Zordan, and Joe Piscopo, were awarded for their work in promoting the Italian language and culture in the US.

Founded by a group of Italian American teachers and professors to promote the discussion of educational issues impacting Italian Americans and to enhance the Italian American image and presence in academia, the [Association of Italian American Educators \(AIAE\)](#) [2] celebrated its 22nd Annual Awards and Scholarships Ceremony.

The celebration was held on May 3rd at the Consulate General of Italy in New York, one of the Association's main supporters. "Associations such as AIAE are key actors in promoting Italian culture in the US," said Consul General Francesco Genuardi, "We are very happy to have them here tonight,



they are the protagonists of the big friendship between Italy and the Tri-state area and we owe them a lot."

Cav. Josephine Maietta, President of the association, educator and community activist for Italian language and culture, then took over and presented the event with great energy and enthusiasm.

Amongst the special guests this year, was former First Lady of the State of New York, [Matilda Cuomo](#) [3], herself a great supporter of Italian culture and an important figure for the Italian American Community of New York. She herself founded the Mentoring USA program and currently leads an educational exchange program between Italy and the US. In her speech, she stressed the role of mentorship and support, much needed in both Italy and the US, and insisted on the importance of family, a recurrent theme throughout the evening.

As it does each year, AIAE honored four outstanding members of the Italian and Italian American community:

The Founder & President of the Italian Association "Ieri Oggi Domani", President of the Association Cavalieri - NJ, and Representative Famiglie Italiane 9/11, Cav. Giulio Picolli, was given the Humanitarian Award.

But Cav. Picolli's important contribution to the Italian American community was recognized beyond the planned ceremony. Many were those who wanted to express their love and admiration for this remarkable man. Former Italian Ambassador to the US, Giulio Terzi, and Amb. Giorgio Radicati, who was the Consul General in New York during 9/11, sent heartfelt congratulatory letters. The Commissioner of the New York City Fire Department, Daniel A. Nigro, could not be present but he also wished to honor Picolli by gifting him a cross made out of metal scraps from the Twin Towers.

Professor Massimo Zordan, Theater Department Director and Master Teacher at Scuola D'Italia Guglielmo Marconi, received the Teacher of the Year Award.

Then, i-Italy's founder and editor-in-chief, Letizia Airos received the Cultural Heritage and Communications Award. In her brief acceptance speech, Letizia broke the procedure by inviting our managing editor, Chiara Basso, who had just walked in with her six-week-old son, to stand up. "This is the future!" she exclaimed - alluding to the new generation of Italians-in-America. Letizia's professional biography was introduced by Professor Stan Pugliese, who recalled how important her work is for the Italian/American culture. In her speech she numbered three reasons why she really cares about this recognition: "because it is linked to the world of young people; because it is dedicated to the promotion of Italian culture and, in particular of the Italian language; because it unites, through culture, the Italian Americans and the Italians."

Finally, the Christopher Columbus Leadership Award went to former SNL Star, Comedian, Actor, Musician, Writer & Radio talk show host, [Joe Piscopo](#) [4], who inevitably took ownership of the stage, capturing the public's attention first by making a passionate speech professing the importance of Italian culture and of being proud of one's heritage and family. At the insistence of Josephine, he then agreed to channel his inner Frank Sinatra and improvised a short song for the public.

It was then time to award the Programma Ponte Pisa Scholarships to this year's recipients: Annalisa Andre, Juliana Bonavita, Anthony D'Angelico, Ryan Emma, Julia Fiederlein, Lauren Giammarella, Garrett Gualtieren, Juliette Kurta, Christina Levi, and Juliana Moneta. These ten young students will get the opportunity to spend two weeks in Pisa this summer to study the Italian language and immerse themselves in the culture.

The recognition " Friend of AIAE Award" was given to Professor and President of [Accademia Napoletana](#) [5], who came from Naples to New York to promote the richness of the Neapolitan dialect with seminars in New York City, especially at Hofstra University and NYU Casa Italiana.

Ms. Tamara Nikitina, an Italian teacher from the Syosset School District, received the Fellowship Award for a study program in Pisa at the Istituto Linguistico Mediterraneo.



And, finally, Dr. Mirko Notarangelo, Art Director and Fellowship Chair, presented his latest visual project entitled 'The New York I Know'.

Credit: Photos by Loren Scott Fiedler.

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