



**THE NEW JERSEY  
ITALIAN AND ITALIAN AMERICAN  
HERITAGE  
COMMISSION AND INSTITUTE**



**Community Outreach Relations Committee  
&  
Community Advisory Council**

**REPORT  
on the  
*3<sup>rd</sup> Semi-Annual  
Community Advisory Council  
Convocation***

March 27, 2004

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## **I. Introduction**

The purpose of this Report is to provide the New Jersey Italian and Italian American Heritage Commission, the Community Advisory Council and the participating public some feedback from the successful 3<sup>rd</sup> Semi-Annual Convocation held on March 27, 2004.

At the Convocation, the general attending public provided some critical perspectives on the relative importance of the projects under consideration by the Commission's Community Advisory Council. These perspectives were presented to the Convocation by the public and recorded for use by the Commission.

While all of the projects were considered important, the attendees provided a view on the needs for these projects, some ideas about their implementation and the relative prioritization of each project. Within this Report, those perspectives are presented in organized form, together with the many comments and recommendations from the attending public. The Report also provides recommendations on the process for implementing these projects, as well as the possible timelines. As is discussed in the Report, some of the recommended projects and activities are already being addressed by the Commission, the New Jersey Institute for Italian and Italian American Heritage Studies and the New Jersey Italian American Heritage Foundation.

Only with involvement, collaboration, cooperation and funding from the Italian American community can these projects be brought to fruition. This "idea origination" session was tremendously insightful and useful, as it represents the first step in statewide community participation in these projects by the general public.

The Commission hopes to hold an equally successful 4<sup>th</sup> Semi-Annual Convocation in the Fall of 2004 and expresses its gratitude for the involvement, interest and participation of all those who attended.

## II. Review of the Convocation

On March 27, 2004 the Community Outreach Relations Committee of the New Jersey Italian and Italian Heritage Commission, together with the Community Advisory Council, hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> Semi-Annual Convocation at the Forsgate Club in Monroe Township. The purpose of this Convocation was to report on the progress of the Commission's work, as well as to receive guidance and input from the community on important issues that should be addressed by the Commission in the coming years. Over 80 Italian American community leaders were in attendance from the State of New Jersey.

The speakers at the Convocation included the Committee's Chairman, Mr. Richard Bilotti, who generously sponsored the event, as well as the Co-Chairpersons of the Community Advisory Council, Mr. Frank Gargione and Dr. Eileen Poiani. Vice-Chairman Angelo Morresi reported on the Commission's progress since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Semi-Annual Convocation in September 2003 and Dr. Robert Freda, the Executive Director Emeritus of the Commission, reported on specific issues regarding the Curriculum Development Project and Higher Education projects. Commissioners in attendance included Dr. Gilda Rorro Baldassari, Dr. Marisa Trubiano, Ms. Barbara Lazzaro, Mr. Mario Marano, Ms. Tina Segali, and Mr. Joseph Alessi. Also in attendance were Members of the Community Advisory Council.

As part of the Program, Ms. Edvige Giunta and Ms. Jennifer Gillan, editors of the Commission's co-sponsored publication, Italian American Writers on New Jersey: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose, read excerpts of their works for the audience.

Following the Commission's presentations, the Convocation participants broke up into eight Focus Groups (consisting of approximately 8-10 people each) and assessed a series of topics developed by Members of the Community Advisory Council. Each of the ten groups spent over an hour reviewing and assessing these potential community projects and then elected a spokesperson to report on the Top Three issues for consideration.

In addition to individual group topics, the Focus Groups considered the following programs, projects and actions, which were suggested by the Community Advisory Council during their meeting on February 10 at Rutgers University.

<b><i>Focus Group Topics</i></b>	
<b>Projects or Issues</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Transforming the Convocations into a Congress of Delegates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a day-long program for delegates of Italian American organizations</li> <li>• Inviting delegations of Italian American organizations</li> <li>• Setting up booths for the Italian American organizations</li> <li>• Creating committees and task forces</li> </ul>
<b>Issues Facing Italian American Organizations Today</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising profile of organization to statewide levels</li> <li>• Retaining and increasing membership</li> <li>• Difficulties in obtaining funding</li> <li>• Transfer of leadership to younger membership</li> <li>• Moving from programs to full-fledged organization</li> <li>• Managing and avoiding conflicting events schedules</li> </ul>
<b>Italian American Organization Scholarships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing statewide inventory &amp; calendar</li> <li>• General scholarships vs. focused scholarships</li> <li>• Scholarships for college vs. summer study in Italy</li> <li>• Creating guidelines for student follow-ups &amp; thank-yous</li> </ul>
<b>Promoting the Italian Language in NJ</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Italian in the school system</li> <li>• Italian adult language programs</li> <li>• Community-based Italian language initiatives</li> <li>• Helping the Commission promote curriculum project</li> </ul>
<b>Cataloguing Italian Resource Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggestions for the Institute Website</li> <li>• Collating Italian educational materials</li> <li>• Distributing Italian resource materials</li> </ul>
<b>Developing Italian American Youth Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inventory current programs in existence</li> <li>• Creating week-long or month-long Summer Programs               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Similar to Governor's School, Boy's/Girl's State, OSIA</li> <li>○ Seminars on history, language, heritage and culture</li> <li>○ For general public, or selective to build Youth Leadership</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Creating statewide Youth Trips to Italy               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Weeklong, chaperoned summer trips to Italy</li> <li>○ Similar to current high school summer trips</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Developing Mentoring and Internship Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bridging the Italian American business community</li> <li>• Career mentoring programs for students</li> <li>• Create internship opportunities for students</li> </ul>

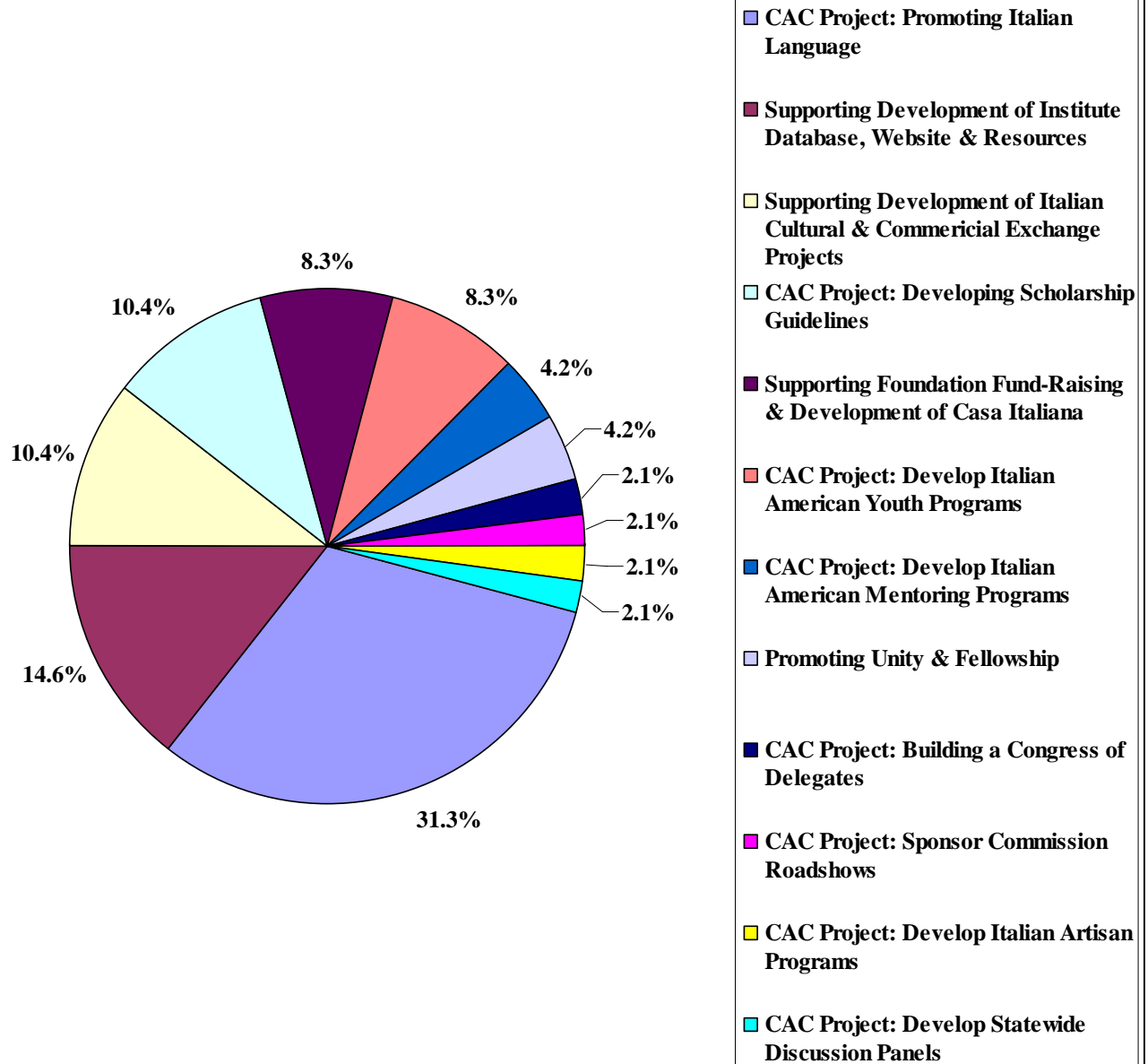
<b><i>Focus Group Topics (Continued)</i></b>	
<b>Projects or Issues</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Developing Italian Artisan Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering cultural exchanges by bringing over Italian artisans from Italy to New Jersey               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Statewide demonstrations in communities</li> <li>○ Fairs with products uniquely developed in Italy or by Italian Americans</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Crafts could include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Venetian glass-blowing</li> <li>○ Tuscan leather and gold jewelry</li> <li>○ Neapolitan cameos &amp; lacquered wood</li> <li>○ Italian marblework</li> <li>○ Italian wine-making</li> <li>○ Italian cuisine</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Vocational school for NJ youth of Italian artisan summer school</li> </ul>
<b>Statewide Community Discussion Panels</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration of Commission and community to have lectures/roundtable discussions about Italian and Italian American topics, such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Heritage, culture and history</li> <li>○ Current events in Italy</li> <li>○ Issues of discrimination and stereotyping</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Hosted by local Italian American organization</li> <li>• Possibly combined with wine-tasting or luncheon/dinner</li> </ul>
<b>Sponsoring Commission Roadshows</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bringing Commissioners and Commission Representatives to local communities</li> <li>• Having Italian American organizations host Commission presentations and interactive discussions locally</li> <li>• Increasing networking between organizations through the Commission</li> </ul>

The purpose of having the attendees of the Convocation to review these potential projects was to receive endorsement from a representative sample of the Italian American community -- in the forms of validation of the need for the project, the relative prioritization of the project and suggested action plans for the projects.

### **III. Focus Group Recommendations**

The discussions by the eight Focus Groups yielded a “Top Three Project” recommendation list from each group, which contained projects and activities from the Focus Group Topic list, as well as new ideas. The information was presented to the Commission during formal presentations by the Focus Groups and a Focus Group Report form was filled out. The recommendations were then analyzed and catalogued into groupings, based on the original Focus Group Topics as well as by projects and activities that are being undertaken by the Commission. A weighted ranking system was applied to projects listed as #1 priority, #2 priority and #3 priority. A summary of the data analysis is presented below. (For black & white versions, the legend below begins with the largest percentage (31%) down to the smallest (2.1%)).

### Analysis of Focus Group Priorities



## **“Top Ranking Projects and Priorities”**

### ***1. Promoting the Italian Language in the Schools and the Communities***

This project ranked as the highest priority, as it was listed as one of the “Top Three” issues in 6 of the 8 groups. Issues addressed included the need of promoting the Italian language in order to preserve Italian heritage, the demand for language classes across the State of New Jersey, the shortage of certified Italian language teachers in the school system and the growing demand in communities for adult language classes. The Focus Groups also suggested mechanisms by which this may be achieved, which are listed further below.

### ***2. Developing the Institute Website, Databases, Master Calendar and Materials***

This topic reflects an amalgam of four related issues which are being addressed by the New Jersey Institute of Italian and Italian American Heritage Studies: a) deploying a community website; b) compiling databases of Italian American organizations and Italian resources; c) posting a Master Calendar of Italian and Italian American community events for the State of New Jersey; and d) Cataloguing and posting various Italian and Italian American resource materials, such as books, language textbooks, teaching aids, etc.

### ***3. Developing Scholarship Inventories & Guidelines for Italian Americans***

This topic tied for 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the rankings. Focus Group members identified the need to develop guidelines for the issuance of the many scholarships by Italian American organizations in New Jersey, especially related to feedback from students and requirements for the scholarship. In addition, the need for a statewide catalog and publication of these scholarships was identified, in order to give students a greater perspective on the scholarships available.

### ***3. Endorsing the Italian Culture & Commercial Exchange Project***

This topic tied for 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the rankings. While Governor McGreevey’s mandate to the Italian American community – the promotion of greater cultural and commercial exchanges between New Jersey and Italy – had not yet been publicly announced, a number of recommendations from the Focus Groups could be classified as elements of this new project. Certain “Top Three” recommendations included: a) Increased networking among Italian American and Italian businesses; b) Promotion of greater cross-cultural exchanges; and c) Increased promotion of networking between Italian American professionals.

### ***5. Development of Italian American Youth Programs***

This topic tied for 5<sup>th</sup> place in the rankings (as there was a tie for 3<sup>rd</sup> place, no fourth place is assigned). The Focus Groups identified the creation of Italian Youth Programs as an important means of preserving the Italian Heritage. Specific ideas included the implementation of programs promoting Youth Tours to Italy, a weeklong or month-long program similar to the Washington D.C.-based Order of the Sons of Italy program for young Italian American leaders and the promotion of Italian music programs.

### ***5. Supporting Fund-Raising and the Development of the Casa Italiana***

This topic tied for 5<sup>th</sup> place in the rankings (as there was a tie for 3<sup>rd</sup> place, no fourth place is assigned). This topic reflects an amalgam of related issues which are being addressed by the New Jersey Italian American Heritage Foundation: a) receiving the patronage of Italian American businesses and entrepreneurs; b) promoting the raising of money to implement the recommended programs; and c) the building of a statewide cultural center, known as the Casa Italiana. The Focus Group Reports endorsed these projects and stressed the need to prioritize these activities.

### ***7. Develop Italian American Mentoring Programs***

This topic tied for 7<sup>th</sup> place in the rankings (as there was a tie for 5<sup>th</sup> place, no sixth place is assigned). The Focus Reports identified the importance of introducing young Italian Americans to different professional careers and suggest using the contacts established with Italian American professionals and businesspeople as a means of developing internship and career counseling opportunities for students.

### ***7. Promotion of Unity and Fellowship***

This topic tied for 7<sup>th</sup> place in the rankings (as there was a tie for 5<sup>th</sup> place, no sixth place is assigned). The Focus Reports identified the importance of creating a Congress of Italian American Organizations in New Jersey, the need for greater unity and activism on the part of Italian American citizens in New Jersey and the need for coordinated efforts to promote Italian heritage.

### ***9. Additional Recommendations Related to the Focus Group Topics***

Four other major projects were endorsed by the Focus Groups, which included:

- Building the Congress of Italian American Organization Delegates
- Organization sponsorship of Commission Roadshows
- Developing Italian Artisan Programs
- Developing Statewide Discussion Panels & an Italian American Radio Show

## **“Detailed Suggestions from Focus Groups”**

### **Suggestions for Major CAC Projects**

#### **Promoting the Italian Language and Heritage in NJ**

- Need for promotion of Italian language in elementary and middle schools.
- Need for Italian teachers
- Need for greater number of Italian courses
- Offer rotating introductory courses in elementary and middle schools.
- Offer teaching majors for Italian at more colleges
- Create surveys of interest for students and parents
- Need for increased promotion of Italian language into the public school system
- Use political leverage to lobby Boards of Education to institute Italian language program
- Create organizations needed to promote Italian language in schools and communities
- Create teams to contact county superintendents' offices
- Setting up meetings with local Boards of Education, PTAs and student representatives
- Promote Italian language through Community education
- Harness volunteers to teach Italian in summer or community programs
- Strengthen World Language mandate in NJ

#### **Italian and Italian American Resources and Materials**

- Deploy website with calendar of events (use Monmouth County website as example)
- Focus on Italian Organization database development and website development
- Catalogue materials with database of resources on the website
- Catalogue materials detailing promotion of trips, tours of cultural events

#### **Develop Italian American Youth Programs**

- Without this, the heritage will decline
- Inventory of what is being done within NJ must be publicized and promoted
- Create pilot program for four groups to promote interest for Italian Youth
- Allow sponsorship by different groups
- Requires substantial funding
- Promotion of music lessons and Italian music history
- Start with a 2-3 day in-state Italian American Youth Program
- Emphasize cultural aspects of Italian Heritage

#### **Develop Scholarship Guidelines for Italian American Organizations**

- Strong need for funds for Italian American university students
- Need for the publication of a scholarship inventory
- Reach out to corporate and individual benefactors for scholarship funds
- Scholarships should not be limited to high school students
- Funds should be made available through post graduate work
- Recipients should be required to “give back” to the Italian American community
- Promote student exchange programs
- Exchange students must report on what was learned through overseas experience

## **Suggestions for Major CAC Projects (Continued)**

### **Building a Congress for Italian American Organizations**

- Grass roots, local organization (monthly meetings) for unity and action
- Quarterly meetings of the Congress
- Need to create a strong voice for Italian Americans
- Must have professional and trained representative among Italian American clubs in NJ
- Need to address and react against negative stereotypes of Italians and Italian Americans in the media
- Use Ritacco Center as meeting place – local county groups to come together and host events
- Develop contact with governors office
- Involvement of church-related organizations
- Offer espresso at these meetings, per piacere

### **Developing Italian Artisans Programs**

- Invite Italian American artisans to participate and demonstrate their talents at local festivals
- Develop a list of such professionals for contacts

### **Statewide Community Discussion Panels**

- Purpose is to generate intellectual discussion on a variety of topics
- Can be used for individual recognitions, wedding/birthday announcements
- Topics may include diversity of Italian regional culture, Italian Women and Italy Today
- Discussion Panel could evolve into a Italian Radio Hour to reach wider audience

### **Developing Mentoring and Internship Opportunities**

- Requires professional and business networking
- Linking high school, universities and businesses

## **Additional Suggestions for Commission**

### **Promote Italian and Italian American Business**

- Develop a Chamber of Commerce for Italian Americans
- Identify business opportunities for NJ businesses in Italy and vica-versa

### **Need Group to Help Patronage of Italian American Businesses.**

- Organize group to create and maintain lists and promote them.
- People put in place in each group to be liaison for info-sharing

### **Develop Casa Italiana into Statewide Cultural Center**

- Casa Italiana should have classrooms and exhibition rooms
- Add a Café for student congregation

### **Promote Cross-Cultural Exchanges**

- Examples would include international trade and artisans

### **Increasing Visibility of Commission**

- Press Releases
- Commission Roadshows
- Develop web site of affairs hosted

## IV. Development of Action Plans

Of the ten Focus Group Topics suggested by the Community Advisory Council, all ten were addressed by the Focus Groups – which represents the validation by the Italian American community that the Commission and the Community Advisory Council are designing projects that are needed and desired in New Jersey. The next step is to develop a series of Action Plans, Task Forces and Timelines for the implementation of these recommendations.

Some of the recommendations made by the Focus Groups are already in the implementation stage.

<i>Focus Group Recommendations in Action</i>	
<b>Projects</b>	<b>Implementation</b>
<b>Develop website, master calendar, databases &amp; resource catalogs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NJ Institute for Italian and Italian American Heritage Studies is in the process of building a new website (separate from the Commission) that will include a Master Calendar for community events, lists of Italian American organizations and catalogs of Italian and Italian American resources</li> <li>• The Institute is also in the process of compiling statewide databases of Italian American organizations, businesses and active Italian American citizens</li> </ul>
<b>Increasing cultural and commercial exchanges between New Jersey and Italy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NJ Italian and Italian American Heritage Commission is working with the Governor of New Jersey, representatives of the Italian Government, and active Italian American citizens of New Jersey to develop a feasibility study that examines the promotion of large cultural exchanges and increased business opportunities between New Jersey and Italy</li> </ul>
<b>Fund-raising and Casa Italiana development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NJ Italian American Heritage Foundation is in the process of raising private funds to support many of these future activities and is working with Rutgers University and Governor McGreevey to design the Casa Italiana – which is to become a central, statewide cultural center for the Italian and Italian American community</li> </ul>

The additional projects being endorsed by the Italian American community will be addressed by the Community Advisory Council. In order for these projects to come into existence, guidance, support and volunteer efforts must originate from the community. Of the recommended projects and activities, the following tables provide a

proposed, realistic implementation plan and timeline for the design, approval, development, fund-raising and execution of these projects.

### **Process for Implementation of Projects**

#### ***1. Community Advisory Council Review and Approval***

- Idea Discussion
- Prioritization of Projects
- Establishment of Timelines
- Selection of Community Advisory Council Project Leadership

#### ***2. Creation of Volunteer Task Forces***

- Assessment of Collaboration Possibilities
- Recruitment of Italian American Organizations, Institutes, Universities
- Recruitment of Volunteers for Program Design

#### ***3. Design of Program***

- Generation of Program Report
- Outline of Tasks, Responsibilities, Action Plans and Timetables

#### ***4. Budgeting of Program***

- Financial assessment of program costs
- Identification of sources of funding

#### ***5. Preparation of Final Program Design***

- Development of marketing materials for Program
- Identification of Program Fund-Raisers

#### ***6. Fund-Raising Process***

- Contact and meetings with potential sponsors
- Selling Program to communities
- Coordination with NJ Italian American Heritage Foundation

#### ***7. Development of Program***

- Executing program plans
- Retaining professional assistance

#### ***8. Execution of Program***

- Implementing program design

## **Possible Timetables for Potential Projects**

### **Calendar Year 2004:**

- Building Databases of Italian American Organizations
- Deploying an Institute Website & Master Calendar for community
- Development of Italian Cultural and Commercial Exchange Project
- Design of Casa Italiana
- Building the Congress of Italian American Organizations
- Development of Scholarship Inventory & Guidelines
- Sponsoring Commission Roadshows

### **Calendar Year 2005:**

- Development of Statewide Community Discussion Panels
- Developing Mentoring and Internship Programs
- Cataloguing Italian Resource Materials
- Planning of Casa Italiana
- Planning for Italian language promotion

### **Calendar Year 2006:**

- Development of Italian American Youth Programs
- Development of Italian language programs
- Building of Casa Italiana

### **Calendar Year 2007:**

- Development of Italian Artisan Programs
- Opening of Casa Italiana

As can be observed from the implementation process and possible timelines, the Community needs to begin planning now for the future resolution of these projects.