



Club Garibaldi News

NOVEMBER 2007

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

What great news it was to return home from the USA to learn that Club Garibaldi's soccer team had defeated Club Italia in Nelson for the third year running! Yippee! Well done, guys! Once again, you did us proud! Congratulations and thanks to all those involved, whether they be the organisers, team players and the many 'fans' and their families who travelled to Nelson to support our team. Thank you Club Italia for hosting our members ... I have no doubt that you will be 'coming after us' with a vengeance, in Wellington next year.

Many thanks also to Vice President, Alfonso Basile, for 'holding the reins' while I was away, and also to Salvi Gaeta for taking care of the accounts for Robin.

Further on in this newsletter is a summary of the weekend Robin and I spent in Washington DC as guests of the National Italian American Foundation. I am sure you will enjoy the read.

Ciao a presto
Ginette Toscano Page

IMPORTANT

VISIT OF GROUP FROM ACCADEMIA DI BELLE ARTI DI BRERA, MILAN, ITALY

Club members are invited to meet a touring group of Italian students, and their tutors, from the Fine Arts Academy di Brera in Milan, which was established in 1776, and has produced some of Italy's top artists. In the last few decades, this illustrious institution has added film-making to its curriculum.

The group of 60 persons aged between 25 and 40 years, wish to connect with the NZ-Italian community and the focus of their tour, is the New Zealand film industry – especially Peter Jackson, Weta Digital and all things associated with *Lord of the Rings*, which is why they are spending 2-3 days in Wellington.

Club Garibaldi will host a function on Sunday 25 November 2007 for two hours, commencing at 6pm. We have received a donation from the Mayor's Office to go toward finger food and orange juice. The club's bar will be open for other refreshments.

NOTES FROM ALFONSO RE CLUB FUNCTIONS, IN GINETTE'S ABSENCE

It was great to see so many people, especially children, at the shared lunch in October. The food was superb and everyone had a good time.

My cousin John and his wife Rosa were over here from Italy on their honeymoon, and they were made to feel very welcome at the Club. They enjoyed the day immensely ... They were even taught how to play bowls!

I would also like to say a big thank you to the members of Club Italia Nelson for the very generous hospitality shown to Club Garibaldi members on the recent soccer trip.

BABY CONGRATULATIONS

To Adriana (nee Dellabarca) and Andrew on the safe arrival of their son Daniel Mario. A grandson for Tina Dellabarca of Island Bay, Wellington.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome to the following new members: Pierpaolo and Charlotte Frisone of Martinborough, Iona Cameron of Lower Hutt and Lucia Roncaglia and Poul Schisler of Lower Hutt.

WEDDING CONGRATULATIONS



The happy couple happiness.

Club members Melanie Federico and Sean Keaney were married on 14 September 2007 in the gardens of a private villa on Muri Beach, in Rarotonga.

In Melanie's words 'The villa was called Island Bay villa and was coincidentally and wonderfully named after our own beautiful Island Bay'.

Forty friends and family from all over the world, including Angela, Melanie's sister from London, flew to Rarotonga to celebrate the couple's special day.

After a three day celebration Melanie and Sean honeymooned on the beautiful island of Aitutaki.

Melanie is the elder daughter of Maureen Federico and the late Salve Federico of Island Bay.

Congratulations Melanie and Sean, Club Garibaldi wish you a lifetime of love and



Melanie & Sean's family and friends. Bridal couple are on the right hand side.

UPCOMING EVENTS

ITALIAN MASS

The next Italian Mass will be held on Sunday 2 December 2007 at 11.30am at St Francis de Sales Church, Island Bay.

Mass is held every first Sunday of the month throughout the year.



SHARED LUNCH

The next shared lunch will be held at the Club rooms on Sunday 2 December 2007 at 1pm. All members and families are very welcome.



Please bring a plate.

TOMBOLA EVENINGS

The Tombola nights are held every 4th Tuesday of the month. **The next evening is on Tuesday, 27th November, at the usual time of 7.30 pm.** Please do come along and feel free to bring a friend. As this will be the last tombola night for 2007, please bring a small plate for supper.

KALEIDOSCOPE OF EUROPEAN CAROLS

Last year lots of Wellingtonians commented that they missed it, so we are pleased to confirm that this year the Kaleidoscope of European Carols is going ahead.

It will be held on Sunday, 2 December at 7pm at the Sound Shell in the Botanic Gardens.

Linda Clark will compare the event at which we will have our favourite versions of "Silent Night", carols with a Mediterranean Maltese flavour, Irish dancing and much, much more.

Come and be part of this celebration of a kaleidoscope of European carols!

SENIOR CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

This year's Senior Christmas Luncheon will be held at the clubrooms on Tuesday 4th December at 12 noon.

Reminder: This invitation is extended to members who are 70 years or older, as well as current financial members who are over the age of 60.

This is always a great function and enjoyed by all who attend.

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

The children's Christmas party will be held at the clubrooms on Saturday, 8 December at 11.30am (age 0 to 12years).

Remember to purchase a gift of no more than \$10-15 for your child to be placed in Father Christmas's bag. Lunch and entertainment will be provided for the children, which will then be followed by a visit from Father Christmas..

ANNUAL BUS TRIP

A great time was had by all who travelled to New Plymouth on last years annual bus trip. You will have seen the photos, and read the report in the March 07 newsletter. Check our website, www.clubgaribaldi.org.nz

This year's annual bus trip will be on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, February 19, 20, and 21st to Rotorua and Taupo.

At this stage, the price has not been finalised, however the bus we wish to secure has seating for 40 people, and if filled would certainly keep costs down.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 15th November (7pm) – Italian Film

Sunday 25th November (6pm) – Fine Arts Academy Function

Tuesday 27th November (7:30pm) - Tombola

Sunday 2nd December (11:30am) - Italian Mass

Sunday 2nd December (1pm) - Shared Lunch

Sunday 2nd December (7pm) - European Carols

Tuesday 4th December (12pm) - Senior Christmas Lunch

Saturday 8th December (11.30am) - Children's Christmas Party

ITALIAN LANGUAGE WEEK 2007

By Nina Cuccurullo

This year's theme for Italian Language Week was 'il mare/the sea'. To celebrate this week Club Garibaldi, along with The Circolo Italiano and in collaboration with Prof Palmiro Sportoletti and the Embassy of Italy, hosted an evening with a series of talks and poetry readings.

Paul Elenio from Club Garibaldi spoke about the Italian fishing community of Wellington, Cav Elizabeth Peek spoke about her ancestors, the Perano whaling family, Dr Marco Sonzogni recited poetry from Eugenio Montale as well as his own compositions, and Rosaria Massa of Island Bay recited a poem especially written for the occasion. There was a fantastic turnout (around 120) of members and friends from both clubs as well as members of the general public. A special display was set up of photos, books and also artwork especially made by our younger members. Thanks to all involved in making this year's Italian Language Week a success. For your information the Italian Language Week is a formal way to recognise the importance of the Italian language around the world. It has been running annually since 2001 and, according to statistics, is worthwhile with a 40% increase in people learning the language at institutions like the Dante Alighieri around the world. We are secure in the knowledge that the Italian language is gaining in strength, even this far away from Italy! Below are some photos taken on the evening. Paul Elenio speaking and the photo, book and artwork display. Check out more photos on the Circolo Italiano website: <http://www.circoloitaliano.org.nz/> GALLERY.



A BIT OF TRIVIA

By Ginette Toscano Page

ANSA – Milan, September 3, 2007.

Italian food researcher, Attilio Del Re of Piacenza's Catholic University told the Italian press today, they have made an ice cream which will earn an honoured place in the healthy diet Italy is famous for. They claim to have produced a perfect, nutritious and balanced mix, in line with the Mediterranean diet.

Del Re's team spent six months taking x-rays and conducting microscope analyses of various mixes before they achieved the finest gelato, which also had to pass the researchers' taste tests.

The mixture contains all the traditional ingredients including milk, eggs and sugar, but has been 'tweaked' to lower the fat content while boosting it's proteins. That is: 30% fat, 15% protein and 55% sugar ... "healthy enough to be eaten every day, in place of a meal", Del Re claimed.

The new gelato makers have applied for a patent and are considering looking for an international distributor. Traditional ice cream is a 'no-no' for diet experts because it is so high in fat. Some brands are so high in calories they have been rated the equivalent of eating a big steak dinner!

CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE CLASSES

On 30 October, the children of the language classes were presented with certificates by Dott Massimo Carnelos from the Embassy of Italy. Parents and children also farewelled their teacher, Giulia Stroghiu, and presented her with a small gift for her 9 years of teaching and dedication to the classes.

A new teacher has been appointed, Sibilla Paparatti who will begin working in 2008. Below is a photo of the children at the end of year party along with Cav Elizabeth Peek, Dott Massimo Carnelos, Giulia Stroghiu and Cav Nina Cuccurullo.



THE ALDO CUCCURULLO MEMORIAL TROPHY SOCCER CHALLENGE IN NELSON ON LABOUR WEEKEND

By Lisa Devitt and Maria Colucci

It was another successful weekend for both Club Garibaldi and Club Italia ... to Club Garibaldi, because of their win - and for the biggest support group to date, and to Club Italia, for doing such a great job of hosting us over the weekend.

It was great and encouraging to see so many children involved with the kids' soccer, for as we all know, they are the future players for this annual event. They had an opportunity to play a game before the main game, and again at half time. The teams were made up by mixing the Wellington and Nelson kids together, to form four teams.

All the senior and junior players



As for the main event, in spite of Team Club Garibaldi members' averaging 40 years, they were very strong indeed, and played the best football that we have seen for many years. The results speak for themselves. We would like to take this opportunity to thank those club members who went to Nelson to



support this event ... we hope they enjoyed the weekend and will continue to help keep the tournament 'alive'. Thank you to our soccer team players for their efforts and for once again, bringing home the trophy.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Paul Lubas and Francis Miccio for helping us to organise the event, and we look forward to next year's challenge in Wellington.

Paul Muollo, John Barton and Antonio Cacace with the trophy

CAR PARKING NOTICE

It has been noted that in recent months, some club members have had their vehicles towed away from the large car park where the Noel Leeming and Big Save stores are located in Tory Street, just up the road from the club. A reminder to all: Beware! the car park is privately owned and has a 24 hour tow-away restriction. However, there are coin operated machines around the perimeter, and it costs as little as \$3-4 to park all night without fear of being towed away.

HOST FAMILY REQUIRED - CAN YOU HELP?



EF Foundation for Foreign Studies has an Italian student from Rome (male) coming to New Zealand, and they are looking for a host family for him. His name is Francesco Lauro, 17 years old, and is from Rome. He is looking for an active kiwi family to live with for half a year from January 2008. He loves golf, tennis, fishing, skiing and football.

CLUB MEMBER TONY MUOLLO ENTERTAINS FOLKS

City Life Weekly Newspaper – 11 September 2007

Living in a residential home in Berhampore, Wellington, is much more action-packed than you might think, what with accordions, Tibetan hand-bells and Tai Chi to contend each week!



Island Bay musician Tony Muollo has many in his audience singing along as he belts out popular tunes for them on the accordion each Thursday morning at Kilmarnock Heights café. The group enables residents of the home and members of the community to meet, socialise and participate in the many events on offer. The Recreation Manager, Annelize Steyn says the café provides a valuable link between residents and the community. If people are feeling a bit lonely in their home, it is wonderful to see them come in and benefit from being surrounded by people of their own age' she says.

EXHIBITION - DRIFT WITH ME

Veronica Green, daughter of club members Letizia and Ralph Columbano-Green, is holding an exhibition of her work at the Expressions Arts and Entertainment Centre, 836 Fergusson Drive, Upper Hutt from 10 November 2007 until 6 January 2008. The exhibition is about her dream ... Venice, where Veronica attended the Venice Biennale. Veronica is an emerging Wellington artist and we wish her a successful exhibition and time in Italy where she will be working next year for 3 months. Auguri Veronica!

WAIKATO MUSUEM EXHIBITION - THE ITALIANS IN NEW ZEALAND

By Nina Cuccurullo

Come and explore the stories and history of the Italians in New Zealand, and absorb their rich and vibrant culture – this time in the Waikato! Tales of migration, food, art and history are all part of this exhibition which gives you the opportunity to learn about one of New Zealand's many communities. Enjoy the beautiful Venetian masks, oral histories, and contemporary Italian art.

This exhibition will be held from 24 November 2007 until 18 May 2008. Check out the following website for further details of up and coming events. If you are on your travels this summer, do pop in to see this Exhibition! Website: <http://www.waikatomuseum.co.nz/>

CLUB GARIBALDI 3 ... CLUB ITALIAN NELSON 2

By Paul Muollo

Club Garibaldi made it 3 wins in a row in the annual Aldo Cuccurullo Trophy game played in Nelson. It was great to see the huge turnout of supporters and see all the children taking part in the earlier games.

The game kicked off with Club Italia on top but against the run of play Mike Gaeta set up Franco Colucci to score from outside the area with a shot that went in off the post. Nelson equalised a few minutes later with an unstoppable free kick from Massamilliano Ancell. Club Garibaldi dominated possession in the final stages of the first half and scored a second after a great cross by Lee Westlake was slotted home by Damian Hannah. Half time; Club Italia 1 Club Garibaldi 2

The 2nd half was a stalemate for much of the half until Nelson equalised through another free kick, George Molnar was the scorer. Fortunately a few minutes later Garibaldi restored their lead when a Dave Da Vanzo shot fell at the feet of Lee Westlake and his shot proved too much for the Italia keeper.

Nelson fought hard to get an equaliser and were unlucky when they hit the underside of the crossbar with the keeper beaten. The final whistle saw Garibaldi hold on for a hard fought victory.

Player of the day for Club Garibaldi was Michael De Gregorio



Club Garibaldi's victorious team & supporters

HISTORIC ARTICLE ON A FOUNDING MEMBER OF CLUB GARIBALDI



A copy of the following newspaper clipping and photograph was recently given to club member Letizia Columbano Green of Wadestown, by her friend, who is a great-granddaughter of George Edmund Robertson, a founding member of Club Garibaldi. Thank you Letizia, for sharing this with your fellow members. The article will be stored in our archives. Because of the age and poor quality of the original newspaper clipping, it has been typed out to enable members to read it with ease.

OBITUARY:

Mr G E Robertson. Died 16 September 1937

The death occurred suddenly yesterday of Mr George Edmund Robertson, JP, Consul for Brazil, and a well-known and much respected citizen of Wellington. He was 84 years of age.

Entering the Government Life Insurance Department shortly after his arrival in New Zealand, the late Mr Robertson occupied various responsible positions and ultimately attaining that of supervisor of new business which was then about 600,000 pounds, and which reached a total of 1,616,979 pounds prior to his retirement. All those who worked with the late Mr Robertson can testify to his many good qualities, unflinching courtesy, encouragement and friendly assistance.

One of his undertakings in Wellington was the formation of the Garibaldi Club, which is still a flourishing institution, and the popular rendezvous for all Italians and their friends. Leading citizens assisted the movement by becoming members, and the first to enrol was the Italian Consular Agent and the Mayor of Wellington (Mr George Fisher), who was then a member of the House of Representatives.

Mr Robertson's assistance to the Italians, in whose language he was an expert, brought him a letter of appreciation from Signor Francesco Crispi, then Prime Minister of Italy, and shortly after this his unflinching services were recognised, and he was appointed a Chevalier of the Order of the Crown of Italy. The deceased was a Justice of Peace and Consul for Brazil in New Zealand. He made it his business to learn Portuguese, which is the language spoken in that country, before accepting his previous position as Vice-Consul, recognising that a knowledge of the language was necessary, and a compliment to the country which he had the honour to represent.

Mr Robertson, with the approval of the Rt Hon R J Seddon, then Prime Minister of New Zealand, was a regular contributor to foreign newspapers. No reference was ever made to politics, and he confined himself purely to the Dominion's progress, to its commercial advancement, and to the many advantages which it offered to the tourist and sportsman.

The deceased was closely connected with Freemasonry and for two years held the office of W M, of Lodge Wellington, No 1521, EC. He was also an active mover in connection with the formation of the Grand Lodge of New Zealand, and was the last survivor of the central executive committee whose good work brought about the establishment of that important and progressive Masonic body in 1890.

The late Mr Robertson was a Past Grand Secretary, honoris causa of the Grand Lodge, and in 1932 the rank of Grand Junior Warden was conferred upon him. He also held the 33rd Degree received from the Grand Council in Rome in recognition of valuable Masonic services rendered to Italian Freemasonry.

The deceased's wife and son, Willie, pre-deceased him some years ago. He leaves two sons, Roland and Cecil, and a daughter Mrs Jack Nelson, of Eastbourne. In accordance with the late Mr Robertson's wishes his remains will be cremated, and the ashes scattered. The funeral will take place tomorrow.

A GLIMPSE INTO ~ ~ ~ SORRENTO

This month the area of Sorrento is featured. Although Salvatore Gaeta was born in Capri, he was raised and educated from a small child, in Sorrento.



Salvatore Gaeta

Sorrento's sea cliffs are impressive and its luxury hotels have attracted famous personalities including Enrico Caruso and Luciano Pavarotti. The harbour services ferry boats and hydrofoil departures to Naples, Amalfi, Positano, Capri and Ischia.

Sorrento is famous for the production of Limoncello, an alcoholic digestive made from lemon rinds, alcohol, water and sugar. Other agricultural production includes citrus fruit, wine, nuts and olives. Wood craftsmanship is also developed.

In the pre-Roman age Sorrento was influenced by the Greek civilization, and its Roman name was Surrentum. According to the Roman historian Diodorus Siculus, Sorrento was founded by Liparus, son of Ausonus, who was king of the Ausoni and the son of Ulysses and Circe. The oldest ruins are Oscan, dating from about 600 BC, and the most important temples of Surrentum were those of Athena and of the Sirens (the latter being the only one in the Greek world in historic times).

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Sorrento was ruled by the Ostrogoths and then returned to the Eastern Empire. This was followed by many invasions which included The Lombards, Amalfi, the Saracens and conquered by the Norman Roger II of Hauteville.. From this point, Sorrento's history followed that of the newly created Kingdom of Sicily.

In 1558 Sorrento was invaded by Muslim pirates, an event which led to the construction of a new line of walls. The most striking event of the following century was the revolt against the Spanish domination of 1648. However, Sorrento remained one of the most important centres of southern Campania and entered into the Neapolitan Republic in 1799.

In 1861 Sorrento officially became part of the new Kingdom of Italy. In the following years it confirmed and increased its status as one of the most renowned tourist destinations of Italy, a trend which continued into the 20th Century.

Local inhabitants are called Sorrentini and their patron saint is San'Antonio, whose feast day is celebrated on February 14 each year.



NATIONAL ITALIAN AMERICAN FOUNDATION:

By Ginette Toscano Page

A little background on NIAF:

NIAF is a non-profit organisation dedicated to preserving and promoting the heritage and culture of Americans of Italian descent, for nearly 25 million Italian Americans, the nation's fifth largest ethnic group.

The NIAF was founded in 1975 as a non-profit organization in Washington, DC. It is entirely non-partisan.

As Robin and I represented Club Garibaldi and the Italians of New Zealand, as invited guests at NIAF's 32nd convention and gala, I would like to share some of the highlights of our weekend.

.....

Robin and I recently returned home after our trip to the United States. As you know, the flight is very long, and for some reason, this time it took us a while to get over the effects of jet lag. However, nothing could possibly dampen the memories of the 'magical' weekend we spent at National Italian American Foundation's 32nd convention and gala in Washington DC.

We had an incredible time and thoroughly enjoyed every moment ... and certainly was an experience which will never be forgotten. We were made to feel most welcome by everybody, and the hospitality and kindness shown to us was second to none. To travel from a tiny country on the other side of the world, knowing few, initially felt a little daunting, however my fears were unfounded, and in no time, felt very comfortable.

The camaraderie and warmth we witnessed among



our American cousins was tremendous, and I marvelled at how strong the bonds were. We share a wonderful culture and it made me very proud to be Italian! Sometimes I pinch myself to make sure it was not a dream! I feel quite 'special' that we were given the opportunity to partake in this special occasion.

We met many prominent sports celebrities, movie stars, politicians, supreme court judges and business people from within the Italian community, who were friendly and very approachable, and even managed to get a few photographs with some of the celebrities.

Ginette with Governor of Arizona, Janet Napolitano, and Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the US House of Representatives

As the list is too long, the following are just some of the people we



met, remembering that all the honourees and special guests were of Italian descent: The Italian Ambassador to the US Giovanni Castellaneta and Mrs Castellaneta, Rudy Giuliani, the former mayor of New York and currently running for the presidency, Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Martin Scoresce, the Academy Award winning director, The Governor of Arizona, Janet Napolitano, Dean Martin's daughter Deana and her husband John, the actress and singer Connie Stevens, Gina Lollabrigida, Louis Freeh, former director of the FBI, who

Ginette & Robin with Gina Lollabrigida

helped break up a huge mafia ring some years ago with Rudy Giuliani, Yogi Berra the famous Yankee baseball player, Ellen Pompeo, who plays the part of Meredith, one of the stars from TV series Grey's Anatomy, and Jerry Vale the 50-60's crooner.

At the glittering gala event, where there were 3,000 guests, NIAF Chairman Dr.A. Kenneth Ciongoli introduced one of Italy's highest ranking officials, Franco Danieli, Italy's Deputy Foreign Minister, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at the Italian Embassy in NZ, during his visit in November 2006.

I was totally taken by surprise when the chairman of NIAF, in between speeches, stood on the podium and told the guests of his visit to Australia and New Zealand earlier in the year, about Club Garibaldi in Wellington, and how he and his family were made to feel very welcome; that the president had travelled half way around the world to attend that weekend ... there I was, thinking to myself 'Oh, that's so nice of him to mention little NZ and the club' when he asked me to stand up in front of everybody! Well, what can I say? My legs simply would not stand up ... somehow they felt pinned to the floor! After what seemed an age, I managed to stand and received an amazing standing ovation. Wow!



NIAF Chairman Ken Ciongoli with Ginette

Thursday – 11 October 2007:

On the morning prior to the commencement of the convention, we took a one hour flight from New York to Washington DC. We arrived at the Hilton Towers Hotel, where the entire weekend activities took place. The hotel reception area was 'buzzing' with lots of very Italian looking individuals – many arriving in chauffeured limousines – our mode of travel was by shuttle van from the airport!

Friday, 12 October:

Collected our tickets for the various functions from the National Executive Director of NIAF. As we had been corresponding for some months, it was good to put a face to a name. The Piazza d'Italia opened at 9am on The Terrace level – a two-day best of Italy exhibition, featuring Maserati, Ferrari and Lamborghini luxury sport vehicles, wine tasting, cooking demonstrations, food, gelati making, travel, jewellery, educational, and a book pavilion featuring works by Italian-American authors. An entertainer was walking around, playing the piano accordion and singing loved Italian songs – just like we do at the club – made it a wonderfully, warm, happy atmosphere.

The first official function was the Celebrity Luncheon at noon, held in one of the hotel's ballrooms. As we made our way in through the entrance, we could not but help notice the visibly high security of police and police dogs ... key guest speaker at the luncheon was the First Lady of the United States, Mrs Laura Bush, followed by the Mayor of Milan, Letizia Moratti. Both women spoke on literacy and education, and the huge impact Italians have made to the USA. The topic chosen was especially poignant and chosen well, as most of the Italian immigrants to the United States were written down on ships' manifest logs as being illiterate – it has since been proved this was not so; as the migrants did not understand or speak English, they were classed illiterate! Robin and I had been allotted 'dress circle' seats, three rows from the front ... the people who shared our table were very



Robin, Deana Martin's husband John, Barbara Ciongoli, Deana & Ginette

friendly ... we enjoyed their company immensely and the fine food served.

Awards were presented to six Italian American women who had contributed so much to not only the USA, but promoting things Italian. I instantly recognised Dean Martin's daughter Deana, Connie Stevens and Lidia Bastianich, an Italian chef on Food TV!

After the luncheon we made our way to Ken Ciongoli and his lovely wife Barbara, who greeted us warmly and were genuinely happy to see us. Ken introduced us to lots of prominent people, all eager to hear about how Robin and I had travelled all the way from NZ, about Club Garibaldi and New Zealand in general.

Made our way back to the Piazza d'Italia to socialise ... I even got to dance the tarantella with a group of Italian women! I tried hard to remember the steps/moves our own club's tarantella group danced! Lots of fun! After three exhausting songs I sat down for a rest, only to be talked into doing it all again ... as visitors wanted to video us women dancing! Mama mia!

After a quick change of clothing and a general spruce up, we were on our way by taxi to the Embassy of Italy for a cocktail party. Security was extremely tight and the roads surrounding the building were closed off ... only official people were allowed to pass. We learned later that all countries' embassies and the White House are located in this area. To enter the buildings of the Embassy was like going through airport checks ... names checked off an official list ... no name, no going through the next door! Handbags were x-rayed and we walked through an x-ray machine. The Embassy is an enormous, modern building, which reminded us of Te Papa ... high ceilings and a glass roof. Drinks were served to the 300 guests in the auditorium, before going through to an adjacent room for snacks. The dining table, beautifully decorated with tall vases of orchids and candles, held huge platters of delicious food ... and as these were eaten, more would come out!

We met many more people, and were introduced to the Italian Ambassador to the United States, Giovanni Castellaneta and his wife. The Ambassador was very sociable and spoke warmly about New Zealand, saying that he had been to our country many times when he was the Italian Ambassador in Melbourne some years ago. We were introduced and had photos taken with the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi and the Governor of Arizona, Janet Napolitano, both of whom were very easy to talk to. Also met and spoke briefly to Gina Lollabrigida ... although she is now in her eighties, she still looks wonderful ... had a photo taken with her too! Entertainment at this function was by a beautiful, young opera star, Giorgia Fumanti, who sang two arias.



Ginette & Robin with Italian Ambassador to the US, Giovanni Castellaneta and Mrs Castellaneta

After the function ended, we were bussed back to the Hilton in time to get dressed for the 'Tribute to Martinis by Neil Sedaka ' dinner, which commenced at 8.30pm. This was held in yet another ballroom with around 2,000 people attending. The guests were catered for by the 'Pasta Stations' placed around the perimeter ... one would fill their plates with the different types of pasta and sauces, salads, bread and dolci, then take their plates back to their tables. A great orchestra played and there was lots of dancing. At 10pm Neil Sedaka came on stage to a rapturous applause ... although now 69 years old, he still has the magic touch, is an excellent entertainer and certainly has not lost his voice ... much to the delight of the audience, he sang all his old hits, plus many of the ones that he wrote for other artists. His energy was unbelievable! A fantastic show!

At the end of the evening Ken Ciongoli introduced us to his sister, her husband and other members of his family, including another son Adam, and two daughters, Happy and Alexandra.

Saturday, 13 October:

After breakfast visited the Piazza d'Italia again. Chatted with a stall-holder, Antonio, born in the outskirts of Rome. When he learned that I was from NZ, tears rolled down his face ... said he needed to tell me about the wonderful ANZAC soldiers he met as a hungry 10 year old boy, a few days before world war two ended, whom he would never, ever forget! This is his story: A couple of jeeps driven by ANZAC's came to his village on a very hot day ... they stopped in front of his house ... his mother came outside and apologised because she could not offer them food, as there was none to give, and the family had not eaten in days ... she offered them water to wash in and said she would wash their dirty clothes, and a cool place to sit ... the soldiers accepted. They left soon after, only to return with boxes full of food ... Antonio and his family ate non-stop for three days! He remembers eating so much, that he was as sick as a dog! I pinned a small 'kiwi' onto his lapel ... more tears, including me, this time!

At noon we went to the 'Celebrity Auction' luncheon in another ballroom. Buffet tables laden with food, and we had good seats again. Lots of celebrities also dined with us. After the meal the auction began, the proceeds from which goes towards scholarships etc for young people of Italian American heritage. Wow! Robin and I could not get over the way people were bidding thousands of dollars for all sorts of things ... anything from wine, jewellery, holidays in Italy, to signed posters and concert tickets. One couple at our table bid and won a ride in a racing car with a famous driver for two hours in Las Vegas - \$US28,000! Another couple at our table bid and won a small case of wine for \$US2,800! I made sure I sat on my hands ... not to mix up my gesticulations with bids! An amazing experience, which lasted over 3 hours!

Time to dress for the glittering gala ... Robin in a tuxedo and me in an evening attire ... I must say we brushed up well for the occasion! A pre-dinner reception, just outside the main ballroom was where all the guests met and socialised ...glamorous people everywhere, all in formal tuxedos and beautiful gowns! We moved into an oval ballroom ... we were in awe, not only at the sheer size of the place, but also the way the 350 tables were tastefully decorated, the flowers and the wonderful signage ... 'NIAF' in blue lighting! There were also 4 huge screens so that wherever you were sitting, you could see all the honourees and special guests. Our table again, was in the 'dress circle' about 6 rows from the stage area, which we shared with two Italian consulates from other US states and their partners, an Italian lawyer and his wife from California, and a well-to-do elderly lady who wore the most gigantic sapphires and diamonds on her fingers and ears, and not forgetting around her neck, I have ever seen!

All settled in, when the fan-fare started ... suddenly applause began, and one by one the honourees and special guests were announced and walked down the red carpet in the centre of the ballroom to the front of the stage ... fantastic! The atmosphere was electric! Time for the national anthems ... first Italy and then the United States ... very moving! As each honouree spoke after receiving their awards, old grainy photos of their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents flashed on the screens ... they all came from very humble beginnings, and through sheer hard work, encouragement and love from their families, they had made it to the top ... many of the honourees and special guests had tears rolling down their cheeks. The ballroom was literally buzzing ... an unbelievable atmosphere ... we were so proud to represent our club at such a special occasion.

During the delicious four course dinner items were sung by a very handsome, talented Vittorio Grigolo and an equally handsome and talented Alfio, a young Australian opera singer. A special tribute was made to the late Luciano Pavarotti, who was an NIAF honouree in 2004.

After the gala dinner, we made our way towards Ken and Barbara Ciongoli, who in turn, introduced us to more well-known and prominent individuals of Italian heritage, and the Master of Ceremonies for the evening, the beautiful TV anchor Maria Bartiromo of CNBC, who wore a most amazing gown!

A post-dinner reception was held at one of the many bars in the hotel ... in fact, it resembled a mini invasion of Italians! Everybody in a happy, relaxed mood ... drinks flowing ... plenty of laughter, conversation and noise ... then someone sat at the piano and began to play ... and once more, the crowd belted out all our well-loved Italian songs ... young and old, sang at the top of their voices; everybody knew all the words ... and the loudest song of all, which was repeated a few times was 'Mama'. The perfect ending to a perfect two days!

Although Robin and I were really tired after two crammed packed days of activities, our adrenalin was flowing and we found it a long time before we fell asleep. Unfortunately, because our flight back to New York was leaving early, we missed Holy Mass on the Sunday morning, which was celebrated in the grand ballroom ... it would have been an apt end to what was an amazing convention and gala weekend.