

Generally Speaking: REMEMBERING JOHN LACORTE

By Theodore W. General | Posted: Thursday, July 7, 2011 1:00 pm

At the invitation of the Brooklyn-based Italian Historical Society of America, we traveled to our nation's capital to view in person the 51st annual commemoration ceremony in memory of Charles J. Bonaparte, the first Italian-American to serve as U.S. attorney general and founder of the F.B.I. The program -- which was sponsored by the society and the U.S. Justice Department -- was held inside the Robert F. Kennedy Building on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Francesco Isgro, senior litigation counsel for the Justice Department, emceed the proceedings. The National Anthem was sung by Nina Di Gregorio, president of the Italian Opera Company which often has performances in Dyker Heights. Benjamin Togati, also of the opera company, sang the Italian national anthem. Welcoming remarks were presented by John Di Cicco, principal deputy assistant attorney general and by Dr. John J. LaCorte, Jr., president of the Italian Historical Society. The keynote speech was delivered by Luca Scognamillo, Italian national police liaison for the Italian Embassy.

Then, Bay Ridge film maker Tony De Nonno showed the documentary, "John N. LaCorte: A Monument to History," which he had produced as a tribute to the late John LaCorte, founder and past president of the society.

LaCorte is credited with almost single-handedly having the bridge from Bay Ridge to Staten Island named for Italian explorer Giovanni da Verrazano. When it opened in 1964, it was the longest suspension bridge in the world. Through his strong lobbying efforts with members of Congress, LaCorte was also instrumental in getting Columbus Day recognized as a national holiday. Through extensive research, LaCorte was also able to determine that Antonio Meucci, was the true inventor of the telephone.

Back in 1961, the Italian Historical Society presented the Justice Department with a monument to Bonaparte that was installed in the RFK Building. A few years later, LaCorte and the society participated in ceremonies where the auditorium in the FBI building was dedicated in memory of Bonaparte. Bonaparte also served as Secretary of the Navy in the Theodore Roosevelt administration.

Joining us for the program in Washington were fellow Bay Ridgeites Sherman Silverman from the Society of Old Brooklynites, Theresa Rosen, executive secretary of the Italian Historical Society and Joseph Sbarra, the treasurer of the Bay Ridge Community Council.

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