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FONDAZIONE ITALIA BREAKS NEW GROUND IN 2008 by Paolo Miliozzi, Ph.D.*

You may remember Fondazione Italia's call for help at the beginning of last summer. The organization had received applications for an Italian government grant from twenty-five schools interested in offering Italian to their students during 2008-09, and at that time it had funds to barely support one of these programs. The community response was immediate and impressive and, along with the favorable recommendations from the Consulate General of Italy in Los Angeles and Com.It.Es, helped produce additional funds from the Italian government that allowed the establishment of Italian programs in **fourteen** elementary and middle schools across Southern California and Arizona. A list of these schools can be seen on www.fondazione-italia.org.

One of the programs that received an Italian government grant through Fondazione Italia that deserves particular attention is the one at Franklin Elementary within the Glendale Unified School District. In fact, the GUSD is preparing to launch an Italian dual-language immersion program beginning next Fall. "An Italian-English bilingual education for our children is a dream come true for the Italian community in Southern California" says Dr. Simona Montanari, Professor of Language Development and Second Language Acquisition at California State University, Los Angeles, and member of Fondazione Italia's Advisory Board. She adds, "First, our Italian-American children will become bilingual and bi-cultural. At the same time, they will benefit from a program which, as research has shown, increases children's cognitive skills and cultural sensitivity." (For information on how to enroll your child in this program contact Dr. Montanari at smontan2@calstatela.edu).

Another Fondazione Italia initiative brought together twenty Italian-speaking high school students last December that gathered at UCLA for a Workshop on the Advanced Placement in Italian (AP). The workshop was presented by Prof. Elissa Tognozzi, Director of Language Studies at the UCLA Italian Department and immediate past Chair of the AP Italian Development Committee, Ida Lanza, Italian Instructor at San Pedro High School and Head of the Italian Language Task Force for Southern California, and Adriana Benvenuto, Italian Instructor at Granada Hills High School and California AATI Representative. Given these students' desire to take the AP Italian exam in May 2009, a ten-week AP Review Course was set up and began on February 14th at the Italian Institute of Culture. (For information about this course, please contact Elisabetta Engler at bengler@fondazione-italia.org or call Fondazione Italia at (310) 739-9350.)

The initiative to gather and encourage high school students who already know Italian to take the AP Italian test was conceived in an effort to increase the number of students taking the test this Spring and with the hope that the College Board will consider reinstating the exam (which was recently suspended after this Spring year due to insufficient participation and resulting lack of funds to support the exam.) The Education Office at the Consulate General of Italy in Los Angeles was instrumental in the realization of the above-mentioned initiatives and it hopes that they will be duplicated across the United

States. In an announcement following the suspension of the AP Italian exam, Ida Lanza, who heads the Italian Language Task Force for Southern California, said “The AP Italian Exam, which took years to establish, was only ‘**suspended**’ not ‘cancelled.’ **We have been given the gift of time**--time to rally our troops, time to press for more funds from foundations, governments and the private sector, time to prepare more teachers to teach AP Italian, time to encourage more students to take Italian 4/5 or AP in 2009-10. We need to have a solid framework in place so that students who do not have Italian in school, but who know Italian can easily take the test. The seminar we had at UCLA should be repeated around the country in every state when the test returns (yes, I said **when** not if!)”

Over the past few years, with the support of the Italian Government, Fondazione Italia has been promoting the teaching and learning of Italian by developing curricula and organizing classes for the benefit of the local communities and the local schools. Fondazione Italia has become the point of reference for many Italian teachers all the way from the San Fernando Valley to Orange County. We have been organizing two Italian Teaching Workshops each year (in September and in February) that are attended by over forty teachers. In 2008 we organized one workshop at California State University Long Beach in collaboration with the Graziadio Center for Italian Studies, and another in collaboration with the Italian Resource Center at UCLA.

The Italian Resource Center, which is housed within the Center for World Languages at UCLA, is in large part funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs through Fondazione Italia. It contains over a thousand books, didactic materials, audio CDs and Italian movies that are loaned to teachers and students of Italian across the Southwestern United States. In October 2008, Fondazione Italia also transferred over 600 books and didactic materials from its office to the Graziadio Center for Italian Studies in an effort to establish a branch of the Italian Resource Center in the Long Beach area, thus providing more readily accessible didactic materials to the students pursuing the Italian teaching credential at CSULB.

In 2008 Fondazione Italia offered 25 year-long classes for children and adults at our centers in Irvine, Burbank, West Los Angeles, Hermosa Beach and Los Feliz, serving 160 children ages 1 to 12, and 60 adults. Please visit www.fondazione-italia.org for information about these classes.

The Italian government funds that are assigned to Fondazione Italia each year are of course limited—more so this year because of recent budget constraints—and are earmarked for programs in elementary and middle schools (grades K through 8.) Accordingly, the expansion of Italian programs at the high school level, as well as of our extracurricular programs, require the essential continued support of the local community. In this regard, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the organizations and foundations that sustained our mission and our programs throughout 2008 with donations to Fondazione Italia – these are, the Diller-Von Furstenberg Foundation, NIAF, the San Gennaro Foundation, Pinnacle Communications, the Orange County American Italian Renaissance Foundation, the Marisa Antonini Foundation, the Associazione Pugliese del Sud, Federated Italo-Americans of Southern California, St. Robert Bellarmine Italian Club, Com.It.Es. of Los Angeles, and the Orange County Italian Cultural



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Association. It is great to see that, despite the current economic crisis, the local community has stepped up to ensure continuity of our programs and support of our beautiful language and heritage. These donations are particularly important in these times of crisis as they allow us to set up scholarship funds that ensure that the children enrolled in our programs continue to learn Italian no matter how their families are being affected by the crisis. Finally, we would also like to thank “L’Italo-Americano” and “Il Corriere di Los Angeles” for their continuous support and for allowing us to reach the local communities by publishing our articles and promoting our mission.

Paolo Miliozzi, Ph.D. is the President of the Board of Directors of Fondazione Italia, a California 501(c)(3) non-profit organization established in 1998 to promote the teaching and learning of the Italian language and culture.