

Political Update – September 2006

The Village of Melrose Park will hold its 2006 Taste of Melrose Park will be celebrated over the Labor Day weekend from September 1 through September 3. The Illinois Festival Association ranks this Taste as the second best after the Taste of Chicago. In celebration of the Silver Anniversary of the Taste, Mayor Ron Serpico is expanding the entertainment offerings, however the food vendors will continue to be at a maximum of \$2 per item, making it one of Illinois' most affordable family oriented food festivals.

The Taste normally draws around 200,000 visitors, but this year Mayor Serpico anticipates nearly 300,000 festival goers because of the top-notch entertainment offerings, and of course, the best mix of Italian and American cuisine you will find anywhere.

Cook County Commissioner Peter Silvestri advises that one of the most revered institutions in the Italian-American communities, Our Lady of Angels Parish, is in the midst of a transformation. The former parish, located at Hamlin and Iowa in Chicago, is moving from a closed facility to a mission assisting the poor in the in the West Humboldt Park neighborhood.

The parish was founded on August 10, 1894 and served the ethnic communities that lived in the area – mainly Italian and Irish-American families, many of them immigrants. On December 1, 1958, the community suffered a horrific loss when a tragic fire at the school took the lives of 92 children and 3 nuns; an additional 76 were injured. The effect on the community resulted in a movement by many of the families that called the parish home. In that last several years, the church and school buildings have been leased to another congregation and a charter school.

Last year, as the request of Cardinal Francis George, Father Robert Lombardo of New York City, came to Chicago to transform Our Lady of Angels. A group of individuals is planning a fundraiser to assist in the renovation of the project, including Commissioner Silvestri. Those interested in donating now may send checks, made payable to "Mission of Our Lady of Angels" and mail c/o St. Francis of Assisi Parish, 932 Kostner Ave., Chicago, IL 60651.

House Small Business Committee Chairman, Congressman Don Manzullo, has urged a group of Chinese officials to start opening their country to more U.S. goods and services to narrow the trade gap and improve business relations between the two countries. Manzullo, who has chaired the U.S.-China Interparliamentary Exchange since 1999, was the moderator of the meeting between members of the U.S. House and China's National People's Congress during the Round 8 of the Exchange in Washington, D.C. During the meeting, Manzullo told the Chinese officials that the U.S. Congress is readying several pieces of legislation to punish China if it does not stop manipulating its currency, which gives Chinese companies a 15-40 percent advantage over American businesses. Manzullo said China must also crack down on piracy of American intellectual property and stop subsidizing its industries.

Manzullo also discussed ways the U.S. government is contributing to the trade deficit with China and efforts he is taking to promote more U.S. exports into China. Specifically, Manzullo said the administration needs to reform its visa process to allow

more Chinese business leaders come to the U.S. to purchase American goods and services and reform and update our nation's export control laws.

Illinois Senator Debbie DeFrancesco Halvorson has sponsored a bill that will clarify current law so railroads can secure their terminal borders for both theft and homeland security purposes.

According to CSX, there is a growing problem of railroad trespassing and theft. Despite the railroad's willingness to pay for such security improvements they often receive denials from local municipalities because of ambiguous and unclear laws. Halvorson says that Senate Bill 2489, which passed unanimously through committee, will clarify current law and will allow railroads to secure their terminals which will keep rail traffic safe and reliable.

Illinois continues to be the rail hub of the nation with over 35,000 train cars being exchanged everyday. The bill is now headed to the full Illinois State Senate where it is expected to pass with bipartisan support.

This column is written by Nina Albano Vidmer, executive director of the Italian American Political Coalition. To submit information, please fax to 708-401-0360 by the first of each month for consideration in the following month's issue.