

**State Rep. Tom Tangretti
Remarks – Columbus 500 Banquet
Saturday, Oct. 22, 2005**

Thank you all very much for allowing me to be part of your wonderful program this evening, and thank you for the recognition you have given me
This is truly a great honor.

I'd also like to congratulate the fine young men and women receiving scholarships here tonight.

The scholarships are a great thing this organization does for the community's young people, and I encourage them to make the most of the opportunity these scholarships provide.

*- ALDO PASSECI
Amy Cocchi*

Also, I would like to congratulate the other awardees; I am honored to be in their company.

We celebrated Columbus Day last week as you so well know.

Columbus may not have found exactly what he was looking for, but we honor him in this nation because what he did discover is a place that millions and

millions of people have yearned to come to every since.

My grandparents came around the turn of the century as most in this room can boast, with practically just the shirts on their backs. Sometimes my friend Rep Micozzie and I have commiserated on occasion what it must have been like:

...in the bowels of a crowded ship

...leaving home for the first time

...no money

... not knowing the language

What a profile in courage!!!

Most of the millions that have set out for these shores have come for the freedom –freedom to make a living; freedom to provide for their families; freedom from the poverty of Southern Italy as it was in the late 19th and early 20th century.

I know that I am thankful that my ancestors found their way to that freedom here; as I'm sure all of us are in this room.

For most of our forbearers, their journey was as hard, if not harder, than that first one by Columbus.

And it was harder after they arrived. As with most new immigrants they were looked on with suspicion and distrust. They suffered discrimination and most were limited to menial jobs. Crowded tenements and lack of basic necessities were an entire generation's experience. Abuse and disparagement of their culture was a daily routine. Garlic snapper, wop, dago were epithets they heard constantly.

But our immigrant ancestors worked long and hard, and they persevered. Many of them were recruited for their skills. Whole towns in Southern Italy were recruited by American Industrialists; passage paid with promises that were less than fulfilled after they arrived usually being paid less than the going rate. And as if it was difficult enough they had to work through a major depression and two world wars. But they never wavered from the goal of providing a future for their families.

And they did because they had solid, honest and decent values, and as a consequence, they succeeded.

Their culture of a strong work ethic and the interconnectedness of the Church played a major part of that success.

Family values weren't preached about but practiced everyday.

And the one that meant the most to them was the value of education; not for themselves but for their children and if that wasn't possible then for their grandchildren. And we the grandchildren are the beneficiaries of that experience.

So working long hours and saving and borrowing were needed to provide the money for that education. Our parents learned that from their parents even though most never completed grade school. And they did so willingly, usually without complaint.

Additionally they knew what the value of family meant, the family gathering at dinner time was an occasion. What it was to wait for your father to come home for our dinner together or our Sunday dinner after Mass. The smells are still fresh in my memory; the sauce with chicken which I found out later in life was called Cacciatore were a wonder to our non-Italian friends who always trying to wrangle an invitation. But more than that was the talk about what was happening in our lives: school, jobs, family news. It was wonderful. I'm distressed to

say that this wonderful tradition is suffering because of the changing cultural needs of our society today.

Although in most cases you didn't have to be told to clean your plate-sometimes you wanted to leave early which was not acceptable:

Rep Freeman, a man of the Jewish faith is fond of pointing out the difference between a Jewish mother and an Italian mother—if you don't eat everything on your plate I'll kill myself the Jewish mother says. The Italian mother says if you don't eat everything on your plate I'll kill you.

*introduce Mom - 46 years -
Dad - Indiana / Ball State*

And so here we are. Our grandparents, our parents, paid their dues for us. They suffered the indignities and endless hours of work so that tonight we can celebrate our culture and honor our young people with scholarship money to further improve their lives.

And we now have our children and grandchildren—some of whom are here—to pass on what the story of their ancestors and the debt they owe as well.

This month, we celebrate our Italian-American heritage and the incredible influence our ancestors, and our contemporaries, have on American culture, life and history.

But the story of Columbus and Italian-Americans is truly the story of all this country's great people, and it presents instruction for all of us.

I know I think about that lesson every day – reach out, explore, discover, make a difference.

I encourage all of you, especially tonight's scholarship recipients, to heed that lesson, as well.

It made our ancestors successful, and they played a huge part in making this nation successful.

It will make all of us successful, as well.

And remember, as Columbus himself taught us, when you set out on your journey of discovery, you may not always find exactly what you were looking for.

But if you continue looking – earnestly, in good faith
and tirelessly – you will always be ~~remembered~~ **REWARDED**
and others ~~will~~ **MAY** always be thankful for ~~you~~ **YOUR** journey.

Again thank you for this honor, and for allowing me
to share this celebration of our heritage with you.

And Godspeed on all your journeys.

###