

## **Casa Belvedere. A Vision into Reality in a Cultural Center in Staten Island**

Benedetta Grasso (February 15, 2010)



Staten Island. Casa Belvedere, an Italian style mansion, has become the new Italian Arts and Culture Center that seeks to preserve and promote the appreciation of Italian language, art, literature, history, fashion, cuisine, and commerce while also celebrating the Italian heritage and the contributions that Italians and Italian-Americans have made to the fabric of the United States.

The borough of Staten Island has always been associated with Italian American culture and its inhabitants often look for stronger bonds with their roots in order to create meaningful connections within the community.

In fact, Staten Island's population is 37.7% of Italian-American, more than any other county in New



York City and the 27th largest Italian-American community in the United States in terms of people.

In this particular area of New York, a mansion with a 2.75 acre estate will become the beacon for this community and will expand beyond it. A non-profit organization, full of potential and resources was inaugurated on February 11, 2010 thanks to two prominent residents and philanthropists, Gina Biancardi-Rammairone and Luciano Rammairone.

[Casa Belvedere](#) [2], an imposing mansion in the Italianate style, has become the new Italian Arts and Culture Center that seeks to preserve and promote an appreciation of Italian language, art, literature, history, fashion, cuisine, and commerce while also celebrating the Italian heritage and the contributions that Italians and Italian-Americans have made to the fabric of the United States.

Surrounded by wonderful views of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge and the city's harbor, endorsed by various business leaders, approved by the NYC government, and supported by all those interested in taking part in new and exciting cultural activities, the Center is ready to launch a series of programs and events that will influence and inspire the Staten Island community.

John Profaci, founder of Colavita USA and Casa Belvedere's new chairman of the board of directors, spoke at the inauguration.

"The purpose of the reception was to establish a working board of directors as well as advisory committees to help the foundation sustain its mission and bring its vision into reality. We hope that many who attended plan to participate in this extraordinary opportunity," said Mr. Profaci.

President and Founder of Casa Belvedere Gina Biancardi-Rammairone greeted the guests and the audience and emphasized the importance of her mission and in securing the necessary funds to renovate the charming mansion and offer a state-of-the-art center.

Gina is a young businesswoman and mother of three who bought the estate on Howard Avenue for \$3.6 million, preventing the construction of townhouses on the lot while finding the perfect site for Casa Belvedere, a project she had in mind for a long time.

The mansion will be completely restored by architects Leonard and Philip Rampulla, from its exterior façade to its interior facilities complete with handicapped-accessible rooms dedicated to exhibits, screenings, and lectures. This plan was finally approved by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, allowing this vision to become a concrete, realistic project. Casa Belvedere will be completed and will officially open its doors in 2011.

The center's purpose is to celebrate Italian-Americans through their heritage, contributions, culture, traditions, language, holidays, and family values.

As Louis Calvelli, the organization's executive director said, "Casa Belvedere hopes to be much more than a cultural and community center. Today we are sitting in a building and with your help we will be able to convert it into a home, 'una vera casa, un incontro', for all of us – Italian-Americans and Italophiles to meet, learn, celebrate, and enjoy."

More info on <http://www.casa-belvedere.org/> [2]

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