

Remembering Quake Victims. L'Aquila 7 Years Ago

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ROME -- On April 6, the seventh anniversary of the severe earthquake that devastated L'Aquila and its surroundings, Italy honored the memory of the 309 victims, who included over 50 university students. Many died when the building in which they were housed collapsed. Most importantly, this year's observances emphasize prevention of future such tragedies, in a nation whose geological structure makes it particularly vulnerable. Young researchers working on quake prevention were given special awards in a ceremony April 5, held in the ultra-modern auditorium designed by famed architect Renzo Piano near the ancient city's historical center and built after the quake.

For the first time the various associations representing victims were present on the stage at



the formal ceremonies. "We cannot forget that this year is also the 40th anniversary of the tragic earthquake in Friuli, in which almost 1,000 people died," said Adriana Cavaglia, chief coordinator of the Civil Protection Commission of the National Council of Geologists. Immediately after the quake parents of the university students who had died at L'Aquila formed an association which sent volunteers into schools all over Italy to foster the new generation's interest in the sciences, beginning with geology. These two organizations offer the awards, the Premio di Laurea AVUS, to research fellows and graduates studying prevention.

"It is true that there is little we can do to reduce the earthquake dangers our country faces," Cavaglia emphasized. "But it is also true that it is possible to conduct a correct policy of prevention, through improvements in the seismic stability of our heritage of buildings, as well as providing sufficient information about natural phenomena, in so doing protecting human lives."

The aim of the April 5 ceremony was to "focus interest in the civil society and the institutions on what can be done to correct the situation or to do more in the future," said Sergio Bianchi, President of the AVUS association of parents of the student victims. Bianchi's son was among those who died in the quake. The AVUS financial awards come from voluntary contributions as well as from sales of "Macerie dentro e fuori" (Ruins Inside and Out) written by journalist Umberto Braccili, who covered the Abruzzo for RAI TV, as his own contribution.

In addition, on April 6 at the Basilica of San Bernardino Marcello Bufalini, director of the Abruzzi Symphonic Orchestra will conduct Mozart's Requiem in a concert. Performing with the orchestra is the chorus of the A. Casella Conservatory of Aquila and several other choirs with long histories in the city: the Corale Gran Sasso the Corale Novantamovem and the Schola Cantorum San Sisto. At the opening of the concert city authorities announce the prize winners of scholarships to study music at the Conservatory offered by the Acea SpA waterworks.

The most moving ceremony of all takes place in the Memorial Chapel in Piazza Del Duomo with a prayer vigil culminating at 3:32 am with 309 tolls of the cathedral bell to recall each person who died.

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