

NIAF's Spring Gala 2018. A New York Style Evening

T. C. (April 06, 2018)



Another culture Italian-American evening in New York at the legendary Cipriani 42nd Street on Tuesday, April 10, 2018. The event has consistently sold out over the past few years, and this year is no exception.

With over 25 million Italian Americans in the United States, the Italian-American community has a significant presence. A strong community needs strong leadership, and that's exactly what [The National Italian American Foundation \(NIAF\)](#) [2] provides. The organization's mission is in fact to serve as a resource for the Italian American Community; to preserve the Italian American heritage and culture; to promote and inspire a positive image and legacy of Italian Americans; and to strengthen and empower ties between the United States and Italy.



One of the Foundation's most important evenings all year is its New York Gala. The evening is a chance for Italians, Italian-Americans, and Italophiles to gather to celebrate the best that the Italian culture has to offer and to recognize the achievements of the Italian community in the U.S.

The event will be held at [Cipriani 42nd Street](#) [3]. Cipriani's, as it's commonly known, is an upscale restaurant located in the heart of Manhattan. The restaurant is renaissance inspired with its marble columns, high ceilings, and beautiful lighting. The event has consistently sold out over the past few years, and this year is no exception.

Honorees

Special honorees of this year will include [Giovanni Colavita CEO of Colavita USA](#) [4]; [Vincent C. Tizzio President](#) [5] & CEO Navigators Management Company, Inc.; [Joseph Sebastian Fichera](#) [6] CEO of Saber Partners, LLC; [Ron Lo Russo](#) [7] President Agency Consulting Group; [Michael Gargiulo](#) [8], Master of Ceremonies Co-Anchor of NBC 4 Today In New York and the Entertainers [Alfio](#) [9] and [Sal Valentinetti](#) [10]. In previous years, NIAF has hosted guests such Martin Scorsese, Sophia Loren, Al Pacino, Luciano Pavarotti, Giorgio Armani, Danny DeVito, Alan Alda, Maria Bartiromo, Mike Piazza, Joe Piscopo, and New York State Governor Andrew M. Cuomo who will be in attendance again this year to present the Mario M. Cuomo Award in Public Service.

Don't miss the chance to celebrate your Italian and Italian-American pride and the many achievements of fellow Italian Americans at the 2018 NIAF GALA in New York at Cipriani.

Cocktails: 6:30 pm

Program: 7:30 pm

For more info please click here [>>](#) [11]

[NIAF](#) [2]

The National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational foundation that promotes Italian American culture and heritage. NIAF serves as a resource on the Italian American community and has educational and youth programs including scholarships, grants, heritage travel and mentoring. NIAF is also the voice for Italian Americans in Washington, D.C. and works closely with the Italian American Congressional Delegation and the White House. NIAF's mission includes advancing U.S.-Italy business, political and cultural relations and has a business council that promotes networking with corporate leaders.

For more info visit the NIAF website here [>>](#) [2]



The Honorees BIOS

GIOVANNI COLAVITA - CEO COLAVITA USA

Giovanni Colavita grew up in southern Italy's Molise region. It was there where the Colavita brand was born out of the Colavita family's generation's old olive mill, which evolved into the worldwide brand it is today. During his childhood, Giovanni was surrounded by the family business and participated in all aspects of olive oil bottling and production from a young age. With the future of the family business in mind, Giovanni earned a bachelor's degree in Law from Rome's La Sapienza, and went on to earn an MBA from the SDA Bocconi School of Management in Milan. He soon became national sales manager and eventually CEO at Colavita Italy, where he gained the valuable experience that led to his current position as CEO and President of Colavita USA, the company's USA branch, and founder of a new venture, Italynthebox. Under Giovanni's management Colavita USA became not only the distributor of Colavita products but the largest distributor of Italian products in the country; representing brands like Baci Perugina, San Benedetto, Cirio and many others

Giovanni and his wife Marisa relocated with their kids to the United States from their home in Italy in 2008. Today they live in New York City, their daughter Lidia and son Leonardo both attended La Scuola d'Italia Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian-English bilingual grade school. Leonardo and Lidia enjoy frequent trips to Italy throughout the year spending time with cousin, aunts, uncles, and grandparents during the summertime and holidays.

Since his arrival in the USA in 2008, Giovanni has participated in several Italian-American organizations. He has been recognized for his support of Italian products and promotion Italian businesses in the USA. Giovanni has been a member of the Italian Trade Agency and Italian Ministry of Economic Development's Food and Wine Advisory Board since 2013. In 2014, he was awarded with the PrimiDieci-Under40 award, which recognizes the personal and professional success of the most distinguished individuals of Italian origin living in the USA.

40 years ago, Colavita was the first company to bring extra virgin olive oil to the kitchens of American families, winning awards and worldwide recognition. Initially pioneered door-to-door back in 1978, this unique "dark olivey green" Colavita extra virgin olive oil made its way into niche retailers like Williams Sonoma, Zabars, Zingermanns and other visionary gourmet stores across the country where the extra virgin olive oil category and craze was born. Colavita was 'first to market' and now has distribution in over 80 countries with leadership in the premium extra virgin olive oil category.

Today, 40 years later, Colavita's priority in sales planning, spending and promotional support strategy remains to be its support of those same traditional brick and mortar retailer customers where Colavita was born and continues to reach olive oil seeking consumers coast-to-coast. However, Colavita has not overlooked the vital importance of diversifying into the emerging e-commerce shopper channels. The modern generation of consumers have been born into a complex and advanced digital age which has changed the shopping landscape and has since tipped the balance of shopping preference from retail store cart pushing to home delivery for ingredients and meal kits.

Over a decade ago, Colavita began allocating resources to forge vital and strategic relationships with Amazon and other e-commerce retailers to ensure visibility and accessibility to these new consumers coming to market and learning about extra virgin olive oil for the first time. Planning with the future success of the e-commerce business in sight, the company made significant financial investments and began growing its sales and marketing teams to include young, talented, digital minded staff from all over the world, to manage this new, growing business. The Colavita family believes that this strong online presence helps to educate all consumers about product quality, recommended uses and consumer testimony to benefit not only Colavita item sales online but also at retail. As a result,



Colavita is now the #1 extra virgin olive oil in the growing online grocery sector. With a 1709% growth in sales to e-commerce partners from 2014 to 2017, e-commerce accounted for almost 15% of Colavita USA's retail sales in 2017, projected to grow to 30% in 2018. Colavita was the first national olive oil brand to see the future of grocery in the online retail business and to heavily invest into this segment.

Colavita's other major online strategic partnership has been with Hello Fresh, the leader in both quality and volume in the booming meal kit space, has also contributed to the strength of the brand, bringing Colavita's premium, authentic Italian products into the kitchens of millions of Americans. Colavita USA's CEO personally trusted in the future potential of Hello Fresh and invested in developing new items for their meal kits since day one when they launched in the US., Today, Hello Fresh celebrates world- wide leadership in this sector with presence in 8 countries, and Colavita is proud to partner with them in the US and around the world.

VINCENT TIZZIO - President, Navigators Management Company

Vince Tizzio is president of Navigators Management Company, the U.S. underwriting operation of Navigators. Mr. Tizzio brings more than 30 years of property and casualty insurance experience to Navigators. Since joining Navigators in 2012, he has enhanced the profitability of the company's U.S. business and has led its growth—launching new products, leveraging technology to deliver more value and support to brokers and policyholders, and broadening Navigators' local presence in major cities across the United States.

Mr. Tizzio joined Navigators from Zurich, where he was executive vice president of Zurich North America, leading the company's commercial markets business, a \$3 billion portfolio with more than 1,100 market-facing underwriting, claims and operations professionals throughout the U.S. and Canada. In this role, he was responsible for creating a business unit to grow the services delivered to small- and medium-sized businesses, launched Select Brokers®, the organization's first program providing enhanced resources and solutions to the company's most valued brokers, and further developed the company's industry vertical expertise and services. Zurich North America produced double-digit growth and significant profitability gains each year under his leadership.

Mr. Tizzio also was with American International Group (AIG) for 16 years, during which time he held a number of underwriting and management positions. During his tenure at AIG, he led the creation of two subsidiaries, developing capabilities in mergers and acquisitions insurance and small commercial insurance products and offerings that were industry-leading and pioneering for AIG at the time.

Mr. Tizzio received a B.A degree in finance and sociology from Adelphi University. Mr. Tizzio serves on the board of governors for Maguire Academy of Risk Management at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. He also serves as a board member of the Visiting Nurse Association, a provider of home-based medical and hospice care and is a longstanding board member of the Freedom House, an organization committed to helping people with addiction. Mr. Tizzio is the founder of Feed Belly Farm, an organization that helps provide food to people in need.

JOSEPH SEBASTIAN FICHERA - Chief Executive Officer of Saber Partners, LLC

Joseph Sebastian Fichera is the chief executive officer of Saber Partners, LLC. His areas of expertise include corporate governance, financial markets, capital finance and effective regulation. He gives independent expert advice to corporations, investors, regulators, and brokerage firms.

Fichera's life path has taken him from a Rochester, NY Catholic military school to Wall Street - with stops at an inner-city public high school, Ivy League universities and our nation's capital. He has a BA from Princeton University and an MBA from Yale University

His investment banking career began as an entry-level associate, rising to become an officer at



Smith Barney Harris Upham and then a managing director, principal at Bear Stearns incorporate finance. Mr. Fichera's government experience includes a presidential appointee staff position in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; and a Board Director on one of the U.S. State Department's Enterprise Funds for Eastern Europe. He has taught at Princeton University as a visiting lecturer in public and international affairs.

As an investment banker, Mr. Fichera has advised Exxon, the U.S. Securities & Exchange Commission, Governor of California, Texas Instruments, among others, as well as state public utility regulators on over \$9 billion in financings for electric market deregulation and environmental compliance. The Wall Street Journal, Institutional Investor, Bloomberg and Yale Management Review have published profiles of his investment banking efforts.

Mr. Fichera serves on the Advisory Board of Princeton University's Center for Economic Policy Studies and previously chaired the University's Economics Department Advisory Council under Ben Bernanke. He also serves on the RFK Human Rights Leadership Council, The Common Good and QuestBridge Scholarship Program.

Mr. Fichera is also an author and commentator on corporate governance, economics, finance, and politics. His writings have appeared in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and Barron's. He has been a guest commentator on financial news media, including CNN, Fox, Bloomberg News and NPR. His most recent article on The New York Times' op-ed page, "The SEC Should Copy the DMV" was praised by commentators from both The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal and named a "Best Business Column" by The Week magazine.

RONALD T. LO RUSSO - PRESIDENT AGENCY CONSULTING GROUP

Mr. Lo Russo is leading the firm's Agency Consulting Group, serving as President. Ron's leadership experience and background in agency leasing helps drive new business opportunities by creating and executing strategies for leasing campaigns. Together with 12 professionals, the Agency Consulting Group actively promote and deliver best-in-class practices of the department to landlords in New York City.

Formerly the President of NY Tri-State Region, Ron was a key member of Cushman & Wakefield's executive management team in the U.S. and reported directly to the CEO of the Americas. He was also a member of the firm's Global Operating Committee. His focus was on driving growth throughout the New York Tri-state Region and oversaw all facets of operations and performance of fifteen regional offices throughout New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Among Mr. Lo Russo's key accomplishments as President of the Tri-State is the launch and development of a regional training and rotational program for aspiring commercial real estate professionals, "PREP" (Professional Real Estate Program), the strategic acquisition of Massey Knakal Realty and integration of team from Eastdil which has strengthened the firm's competitive advantage throughout the region particularly in Capital Markets.

An attorney by trade, Mr. Lo Russo has structured complex lease and acquisition transactions throughout Manhattan.

Prior to joining Cushman & Wakefield, Mr. Lo Russo spent sixteen years with Vornado Realty Trust—seven of these as Vice President of Leasing for their New York Office Division—where he oversaw a portfolio of commercial real estate transactions totaling more than 6.5 million-square-feet.

Mr. Lo Russo is a graduate of the Stern School of Business; holds a JD from New York Law School and is licensed to practice law in New York and New Jersey. He is Chairman Emeritus of the Young Men's/Women's Real Estate Association. He also serves on the Boards of Boy Scouts of New York and Tomorrow's Hope, a Trustee of the Citizens Budget Commission, New York and is a member of Partnership for New York City. Originally from Bergen County, New Jersey, Mr. Lo Russo now resides in Long Island with his wife and three children.



MICHAEL GARGIULO

Emmy-award winning journalist Michael Gargiulo is co-anchor of NBC 4 New York's "Today in New York" on weekday mornings from 4:00 a.m. to 7 a.m.

Gargiulo has a special interest in military affairs and earned an Emmy award for his reporting from Iraq and Kuwait. He also was one of the last reporters to be embedded with a U.S. military unit in Afghanistan before the end of combat operations there.

A native New Yorker and Eagle Scout, Gargiulo is a graduate of Xavier High School and New York University, though his career began at WSAZ-TV in Huntington, West Virginia. Before coming home to New York and WNBC in 2006, he reported for WYOU in Scranton, WLKY in Louisville, KSTP in Minneapolis, Hearst Argyle Washington Bureau, and WTTG in Washington.

Gargiulo lives in Westchester with his wife and two children and serves as the host of many community events, particularly those helping food banks and homeless relief programs.

ALFIO

Captivating audiences around the world with powerful vocals combined with charming comedic banter, ALFIO brings a new approach to the tenor tradition through his modern interpretations of English and Italian standards, classical takes on contemporary chart-toppers and original songs that bridge musical genres. In August 2015, ALFIO joined the illustrious ranks of tenors on PBS with the successful debut of ALFIO In Concert, followed by a national tour in key markets in the Fall 2015 and a Top 10 Album on the Billboard charts. Additionally, ALFIO In Concert has garnered TWO Emmy® Nominations!

An Australian native of Italian descent, classically-trained ALFIO brings passion to his performances and draws constant comparisons to superstars Andrea Bocelli and Michael Buble. This charismatic singer, songwriter and musician is a modern throwback to the legendary greats, delivering a mesmerizing live show filled with much-loved classics, pop standards plus his acclaimed originals. Providing a World Class show with equal parts music journey, powerful vocals and comedy, ALFIO effortlessly brings all generations of music lovers together in one audience; and regardless of whether he sings in English, Italian or Spanish, all languages flow as one.

While studying voice in Parma, Italy, ALFIO was on the road to becoming a tenor, but the constraints of that particular musical track clashed with his strong desire to sing contemporary and classic songs while still being able to compose his own music. As a result, ALFIO strayed slightly from becoming a tenor to become what he jokingly calls a "nine-and-a-half." But when it comes to ALFIO's deep commitment to his art and the passionate performances which that commitment evokes, he is a solid ten. ALFIO carries a depth and sincerity in his music that might not have been as fully developed had he chosen a path that took him even slightly away from his own calling.

As an accomplished songwriter, musician and composer ALFIO is reaching critical acclaim with his own penned songs such as "Il Nostro Sogno (Our Dream)", a song about the wish for world peace which has been recorded and released by other artists around the world. This hit single pushed his debut album on Warner Music to Top 10 and Gold status in Australia. "Voce Pura"/"Pavarotti" is his loving tribute to Maestro Luciano Pavarotti, which was written after a wonderful dinner they had together in Sydney and sent to Pavarotti before his death. Not to mention the title track of his latest album "After Love," which could be as at home on the Pop charts as in the context of the traditional Italian repertoire of love and loss.

Whether sitting solo at the piano, backed by an orchestra, or singing a cappella, ALFIO believes in connecting with his audience. One of his most appealing qualities in both his music and his life is his



ability to entwine generations. His music and live show is a testament to that and speaks to the sentiment for all generations to move forward while not forgetting to appreciate the classics. With a talent that is uniquely his own, one thing is clear--ALFIO is traveling in his own lane and doing it his way.

SAL VALENTINETTI

Sal Valentinetti is an Italian-American crooner known best for his flawless vocals, larger than life personality, and his heart of gold. Born August 26, 1995 to Steve and Maria Valentinetti, Sal was raised in the small town of Bethpage, New York. From a very young age Sal was influenced by his grandmother, Tina Valentinetti, to love the musical genius of the classic crooner sounds of Dean Martin, Tony Bennett and Frank Sinatra.

At the young age of fifteen Sal realized the hidden talent he possessed and began performing his flawless tribute to the great Frank Sinatra. Before long the world would come to know him as "Sal the Voice".

In 2016, Season 11 of the NBC hit show "America's Got Talent" was taken by storm by Sal Valentinetti. The 20-year-old college student that delivered Pizza for his cousin's Italian restaurant was now in the spotlight. Belting out the classic Frank Sinatra hit "My Way", Sal not only received a standing ovation, but got the coveted "Golden Buzzer" from judge Heidi Klum, who he later performed a duo with singing "Santa Baby".

Ever since the Bethpage native showed off his singing chops and unexpected love for jazz on season 11 of America's Got Talent, his life has been a roller coaster ride. Yet Valentinetti wasn't always aware of his talent. It was during a horn lesson at 15 when it was uncovered. The instructor asked him to choose a song to play and Valentinetti started singing the lyrics to a song he used to listen to with his grandmother: Bobby Darin's "Mack the Knife." Taken aback, the instructor immediately urged him to get singing lessons. With further encouragement from his beloved Uncle Joe, Valentinetti started to take his skill seriously.

These days, singing is all he does. Valentinetti has been touring all over the nation and selling out shows back home at The Paramount in Huntington and the Patchogue Theatre.

"It's really been incredible to see the amount of people, especially from Long Island, who have rallied around me," said Valentinetti, who also released a self-titled EP on July 1. "There's no place like home."

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[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93MPdJEZ8_c

[11] <http://www.niaf.org/events/niaf-new-york-gala-2018/>