

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 6, 2009

**B.P. MOLINARO AND MAYOR D'ADDONA OF CRESPINA, ITALY
ANNOUNCE LAUNCH OF ANNUAL STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM**

Hold First-Ever Skype Connection Between Staten Island School and Foreign Students

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- In celebration of the Sister City relationship between Staten Island and the town of Crespina, Italy, Borough President James P. Molinaro and Crespina Mayor Thomas D'Addona today announced a number of initiatives aimed at bringing their respective constituents closer together throughout the year.

Joined by other public officials, business and community leaders, and an official 11-member delegation from Crespina, Molinaro and D'Addona launched an annual exchange program for high-school aged students. The program will commence with two students traveling to Crespina during the 2010 Easter break and two students from Crespina traveling to Staten Island during the 2010 Thanksgiving break.

The initiative will be sponsored by local business leaders and private donations on both sides of the Atlantic with a goal of fostering greater cultural appreciation between Italy and the United States and allowing for the students to increase their knowledge of each other's language.

"The way to best understand the Italian culture and language and vice versa, is to travel to the country, talk to the people, and visit places you only get to see on TV or read about in books or on the web," said Molinaro. "This exchange program is a wonderful part of our Sister City relationship."

"From art and music to architecture and science, we have an enormous amount of culture to share with our friends on Staten Island and they do as well," said D'Addona. "This exchange program embodies all that our two great nations have to offer."

The exchange program will be administered by Casa Belvedere, The Italian Cultural Foundation, Inc., a newly minted not-for-profit that seeks to preserve, promote, and celebrate the rich heritage of Italy by encouraging an appreciation of the Italian language, arts, literature,

(more)

history, fashion, cuisine, and commerce through educational programs, exhibits, and events. Local business leaders R. Randy Lee, John Profaci, Joseph LiBassi and Henry Salmon also will be assisting with the implementation of the program.

Molinaro and D'Addona also presided over the first "Skype Connection" between schoolchildren on Staten Island and another country. (Skype is free video conferencing over the Internet). During the "Skype Connection" held at Borough Hall, students from the Italian studies class at New Dorp High School and students from Crespina spoke with each other and discussed a number of topics.

"Through this exchange program and modern technology, Staten Island and Crespina will become even closer over time," added Molinaro, noting that his office's website, www.StatenIslandUSA.com has a link to Crespina's municipality website <http://comuni.spad.it/crespina>. "We look forward to growing this already strong relationship."

Some of the participating students also pledged to become "friends" on Facebook and a group was created on Facebook named "Crespina and Staten Island Sister City Initiative," which can be joined by all registered users of the site.

"Technology has once again brought people together from across the globe which would have never been possible just a few short years ago," said D'Addona. "This is a great day for Staten Island and Crespina, and for our two nations."

Today's event capped off a week of festivities marking the Sister City relationship between Staten Island and Crespina. Last week a reception was held at Gracie Mansion in honor of Mayor D'Addona and his delegation and on Sunday the mayor was Grand Marshal of the Staten Island Columbus Day Parade and marched alongside Borough President Molinaro and New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg.

"The hospitality my delegation has been shown here in Staten Island has been incredible," said D'Addona. "We are proud to announce that Crespina would like to reciprocate the generosity and extend the same courtesy to our brothers and sisters of Staten Island by inviting them to Tuscany as part of this program. We can only hope to offer Borough President Molinaro and his wonderful delegation the same kindness they have shown us.

"This has been a wonderful and historic week for Crespina, Tuscany and Italy," D'Addona added. "I feel like a Staten Islander already and I love New York!"

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