



VOL. 9 NO. 2 APRIL 2013 SPECIAL ISSUE

# IL CAVALIERE

OFFICIAL BULLETIN OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF THE ITALIAN LEGIONS OF MERIT

## AN UNFORGETTABLE EXCURSION TO SICILY

MARCH 9 - 17, 2013

With visits to ancient cultural sites, meetings with prominent officials and memorable wine tastings and authentic cuisine, the program for the March 2013 trip to Sicily organized by the American Society of the Italian Legions of Merit proved unforgettable. The group of distinguished ASILM members from across the United States ventured to one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world to represent their prestigious Society in Italy. The delegation arrived in Palermo with high expectations for the nine-day trip across the island. They were not disappointed.

During this one-of-a-kind trip, ASILM members visited many remarkable places across Sicily, including Palermo and Taormina, where they enjoyed in-depth guided tours on the history and cultural significance of these cities and their famous sites. Members embarked on adventurous trips to smaller towns,

including Monreale, Agrigento, Erice, Piazza Armerina and Marsala. Here they explored ancient sites (temples, churches and mosaics) and tasted local cuisine, both of which spoke volumes of Sicily's rich and fascinating cultural heritage. And, of course, no trip to Sicily would have been complete without a tour of Mount Etna, one of the most active volcanoes in the world.

One of the first and most special memories of the trip was the meeting with the Mayor of Palermo, the Hon. Leoluca Orlando, at Villa Niscredi. A palace teeming with history, Villa Niscredi now functions as the office of the mayor, or City Hall, and is located next to the famous Parco della Favorita. Upon arrival at the villa, the mayor gave the group a cordial welcome and thanked them for traveling such a long distance to meet with him.

*(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)*



*The ASILM delegation has an unprecedented meeting with Hon. Leoluca Orlando (C), Mayor of Palermo, at Villa Niscredi during the official trip to Sicily.*



Mayor Orlando spoke about the villa, its rich history and importance, and how he acquired it for the city of Palermo. From there, he delved into the challenges of being mayor of such a prominent yet frenetic city, admitting that such challenges are worth undertaking in order to improve the quality of Palermo and to preserve its culture.

For his determination to improve Palermo and in recognition of his strong leadership and humanitarian endeavors, ASILM President, Cav. di Gran Croce Dr. Lucio Caputo, presented Mayor Orlando with the Society's "Gold Medal of Merit," an award the mayor graciously accepted.

The meeting with the mayor didn't end on that note. To the delegation's surprise, Mayor Orlando personally led the group on a tour of the villa, offering them a rare inside-look at the elegant rooms, all of which were adorned with murals and antiques. He even gave them a peek into his office. The tour was a warm gesture members will remember for years to come.

Another meeting was held with the Mayor of Marsala, Hon. Giulia Maria Adamo. Later, during a dinner at Cantine Florio, the mayor praised the Society and thanked the delegation warmly for visiting Marsala and its famous winery.

Official meetings were not the only items on the agenda. As with the dinner at the celebrated Cantine Florio, members also experienced the island of Sicily through its renowned wineries. Indeed,

two memorable evenings were spent at Cantine Florio in Marsala and two days later at the Feudo Principi di Butera winery.

A "surprise" awaited the delegation as soon as it arrived at Cantine Florio. A tumultuous banging and clashing of tools against wood sparked curiosity among members, and they were led by the director of the winery, Vincenzo Oriana, to the source of the noise: three men at work shaping a barrel using fire, hammers and other tools until the form was in perfect condition to store wines. They all watched this intricate process that was unlike anything many of them had ever seen, adding yet another unique experience to the trip.

The winery had more surprises in store. It organized a private walking tour of Cantine Florio that traced the history of the winery and the process of making, aging and storing its fine wines. The tour concluded with a tasting of three different styles of Marsala wines paired with food, a sampling that showcased the individual character of each wine.

Following the wine tasting and preceding the dinner, an awards ceremony took place for the "Paladini dei Vini di Sicilia." During this ceremony organized

by Avv. Diego Maggio, president of the historic society, members of the delegation were awarded honorary titles for protecting and preserving the name and value of Sicilian wine throughout the world.

*"The trip to Sicily with ASILM was truly memorable and well planned. Notwithstanding the bad weather, the trips to the Marsala Florio winery and the Zonin winery were interesting, informative and delicious. Wonderful friendships were forged during the bus rides to our various destinations and a good time was had by all."*

*~Cav. Vivian Cardia*

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)



Hon. Leoluca Orlando (C) poses in his office with ASILM Board members (L to R): Comm. Salvatore Salibello, Cav. Vivian Cardia, Cav. di Gran Croce, Dr. Lucio Caputo, Cav. di Gran Croce, Hon. Dominic Massaro and Cav. Berardo Paradiso.



Dr. Caputo presents the ASILM Gold Medal of Merit to the Mayor of Palermo, the Hon. Leoluca Orlando, during the delegation's visit to the mayor's office.



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ITALIAN LEGIONS OF MERIT

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*The picturesque view of the gulf of Mondello, one of the many sites that the delegation visited during its trip.*



*Members of the delegation spent a tasty evening dining at Antico Stabilimento Balneare in Mondello.*



*The exterior of Antico Stabilimento Balneare in Mondello.*



Members are shown the process of shaping a wine barrel during their visit to Cantine Florio in Marsala.



The delegation participates in a private walking tour of Cantine Florio.



Some members of the delegation and the owner of Cantine Florio, Vincenzo Oriana (C), were awarded the title Paladini dei Vini di Sicilia.



Cav. Dr. Donna Mancini is one of the ASILM members honored as part of the elite group of Paladini dei Vini di Sicilia by Avv. Diego Maggio, president of the historic society.



An elegant wine tasting of three different Marsala wines was organized for the delegation by Cantine Florio.



Dr. Caputo with Mayor of Marsala, Hon. Giulia Maria Adamo, at Cantine Florio.



The second winery visited was Feudo Principi di Butera, the Casa Vinicola Zonin estate, located in the district of Butera in southern Sicily. Moments after arriving at the estate, the delegation was given the winery's best Prosecco and shown various tools used for centuries in the winemaking process. Guided by knowledgeable enologist Claudio Galosi, members strolled through various rooms of the estate absorbing the history of the winery and the process of growing and producing wines of exceptional quality. One fact that members learned from their tour was that Feudo Principi di Butera's rolling hills, altitude and close proximity to the sea offer ideal conditions for the production of outstanding fine wines. Members experienced the wines during a special dinner featuring red, white and dessert wines produced by the winery. Members were impressed by each wine's unique taste and how they paired perfectly with the gourmet meal.

Perhaps the most adventurous part of the trip was the excursion to Mount Etna, the tallest active volcano in Europe whose summit stands at 10,922 feet (3,329 meters). It is also one of the most active in the world. Although the volcano had stopped erupting days before the climb up the slopes, it was not the most reassuring fact to calm the nerves. Emboldened members embarked on their journey up its black slopes, taking in the eerie volcanic landscape of rivers of lava rock and abandoned houses that suddenly changed into blizzard-like conditions as they reached Rifugio Sapienza, located at about 6,309 feet (1,923 meters) above sea-level. Members looked around as they stepped off their private coach, feeling both amazed by the change of

scenery (earlier that day they had been in Taormina, a beach-resort town where conditions were much warmer), at their extremely high altitude, and lastly by the reality that they were standing on one of the most dangerous volcanoes on earth. As the private coach drove carefully down the mountain toward Mazzarò on the coast, it was as if the seasons changed from winter to spring in an hour's time.

Indeed, the trip offered excursions to famous places such as Erice, Mondello, Monreale and Piazza Armerina. These day trips allowed the group to explore the many diverse characteristics, architecture and landscapes of the small towns outside the bustling, cities and towns that make Sicily truly unique.

*"The hotels, food and transportation were outstanding. There were many extraordinary sites that we visited like Monreale, Valley of the Temples, Villa Romana del Casale, Palazzo dei Normanni and many more. We also visited two wineries that were very interesting. The group bonded immediately which created a fun experience for all. Although the trip went by fast, we all have great memories from it. Looking forward to the next trip!"*

~Comm. Salvatore Salibello

in all its majesty. Members strolled through the cobbled streets, shopping and tasting the various pastries as they noted the enigmatic character of the town of Erice, so different from that of Palermo.

The beach resort town of Mondello offered a more pleasing temperature for members as they walked down the main boardwalk, packed with smiling tourists, Sicilians and dogs of all sizes. A colorful seaside resort with an energetic atmosphere, Mondello has

Located on the top of a mountain of the same name, Erice evoked an aura of mystery as its quiet streets were shrouded in heavy fog and a slight chill. Its famous Castle of Venus could still be seen in spite of the weather, towering over the town



*Esteemed enologist, Mr. Claudio Galosi, takes the delegation on an informative, private tour of the Feudo Principi di Butera winery.*



*The delegation and the winery's enologists pose in the wine cellar of Feudo Principi di Butera.*



for decades been the most ideal location for summer homes of aristocratic Italians looking to escape the fast pace of Palermo. Members also appreciated this brief respite as they spent the day enjoying the sunny weather and visiting the sandy beach.

The small town of Monreale gave some pleasant memories to the delegation as well. It is situated on the hillside located above the Conca d'Oro, or Golden Valley, named for the once numerous citrus orchards that stretched across the land. The delegation made sure to visit the town's cathedral and cloisters, both of which are considered Sicily's greatest Norman buildings, dating as far back as the 12th century. The group was impressed by the gleaming gold mosaics that covered the upper part of the cathedral's interior, as well as by the biblical scenes painted on the walls and the omnipresent image of Christ Pantocrator above the altar.

To the members walking around the cloister in Monreale, the sculptures were like brief mysterious glimpses into the medieval mind: there was a person riding a camel, several scenes of fighting, men with big dogs, acrobats and strange beasts. The town also provided superb views of the valley below and of the city of Palermo.

Another memorable day trip was to the Villa Romana del Casale in the town of Piazza Armerina, a true "gem." In this newly renovated grand villa, members feasted their eyes on colorful mosaics depicting tigers, elephants, now-extinct creatures, mythological characters, hunting scenes and battles. Many of these mosaics were surprisingly colorful, despite their age. Members were able to admire the world-famous images of women dressed in what appeared to be bikinis (although in actuality they were athletic clothing), as well as some rather scandalous images for that period.

For many members in the group, the visit to the Villa Romana del Casale and its ancient mosaics provided an entirely new experience that they were pleased to take home with them.

The Valley of the Temples in Agrigento also added a thrilling aspect to the trip that transported members back in time to the era of Ancient Greece. The group walked through the heart of the valley, breathing in the history and beauty of the well-preserved seven temples dating from the 6th century B.C. Once again members were discovering Sicily's culture and history simply by walking through towns and visiting the numerous diverse sites; and how that history differentiated Sicily from anywhere else in the world.

That is not to say that the more populous cities of Palermo and Taormina did not offer spectacular sites and outstanding experiences. During their stay in Palermo, members set out on a guided walking tour to gain as much knowledge as they could about the fifth largest city in Italy. In just a few hours, members of the delegation visited Monte Pellegrino (what Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once called "the most beautiful promontory in the world"), the Cathedral, Palazzo dei Normanni, Capella Sistina and

its legendary mosaics, Quattro Canti, Piazza delle Aquile, Fontana della Vergogna, La Favorita, Palazzina Cinese and La Mortarana. The tour concluded with an in-depth look into the massive Teatro Massimo, one of the largest opera houses in Europe, where members explored its many fascinating back-stage rooms and extravagant costumes.

While in Taormina toward the end of the trip, the delegation dedicated a sunny day to exploring the city, particularly its Greek Theatre. The theatre was situated on a hill to allow a natural incline of the valley to create auditorium seating. Built in the Hellenistic era, the Greek Theatre was completely renovated by the Romans and used for gladiatorial shows. Members marveled at the ancient ruins, as well as the panoramic views of the coast

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 10)



*Feudo Principi di Butera presented its best wines paired with the dinner in honor of the ASILM delegation.*



*Dr. Caputo with Mr. Claudio Galosi at the dinner hosted by Feudo Principi di Butera.*



*Members pay a trip to Monreale, where they explore its Norman cathedral and cloisters.*



*The cloisters of Monreale, adjacent to the town's duomo.*



*The delegation enjoys a guided tour of several sites in Palermo, including the city's cathedral.*



*The guide explains the history of the city of Palermo during the private walking tour.*



*Villa Romana del Casale in Piazza Armerina with its many ancient Roman mosaics.*



*World-famous "bikini girls" in Piazza Armerina's Villa Romana del Casale.*



*One of the many day trips was to Agrigento and its famous Valley of the Temples.*



*Some members of the delegation warm up in one of the refuge centers on Mt. Etna.*



*Ms. Silvia Dondi (L) and Ms. Kimberly Fry outside of Rifugio Sapienza on Mt. Etna during the blizzard that welcomed the group.*



*The enchanting city of Taormina offered attractive views of the seaside, as well as of many sites such as the Greek Theatre.*



*A beautiful church in the center of Taormina.*



*(L to R): Mrs. Lisa Salibello, Cav. Dr. Donna Mancini, Mrs. Mary Ann Mattone, Cav. Vivian Cardia, Mrs. Frances Massaro and Mrs. Loyse Paradiso take a photo together in the San Domenico Hotel.*



*Members enjoy a cocktail reception in their honor at San Domenico Hotel on their first evening in Taormina.*



*Mr. Frank Desiderio, Esq., and Comm. Salvatore Salibello mingle during the reception at San Domenico Hotel.*



*Members of the delegation enjoy their welcome dinner at the elegant restaurant in San Domenico Hotel.*



*Some members of the delegation pose together during their guided tour of Taormina.*



*The Greek Theatre was a major highlight of the tour of the city of Taormina.*



*Members listen to their tour guide discuss the history of the Greek Theatre.*



and Mount Etna offered by the its location on the hill. In their adventure through the rest of the resort town, members also noted other examples of its Greek and Roman architecture, its medieval quarter, its castle ruins and its chic shops and restaurants.

The trip to Sicily began on March 9th in Palermo and ended on March 17th in the picturesque town of Taormina on the eastern coast.

Members stayed in the most elegant hotels in Sicily during their visit: Grand Hotel Villa Igia in Palermo, Antica Perla Residence Hotel in Agrigento and San Domenico Palace Hotel in Taormina. Surrounded by exquisite gardens, Art-Nouveau hotel Villa Igia offered exceptional views of the seaside and a history that goes back more than one hundred years. Antica Perla Residence Hotel opened its doors for the ASILM delegation when all other hotels in the neighborhood were closed for the winter recess, providing accommodations that overlooked the Mediterranean Sea. Last but not least, the San Domenico, located in the heart of Taormina, provided its guests with ancient monastery corridors, terraces with views of the sea and of the famous Isola Bella, and gardens and cloisters.

These three stunning hotels were special in decor and generous in hospitality, and they offered welcome temporary residences for the delegation during the visit to the island.

Further enhancing the visit was the series of dinners that offered authentic Sicilian cuisine. Together the group attended intimate dinners in their hotels, such as the welcome dinner in Villa Igia's Donna Franco Florio Restaurant in Palermo and two spectacular dinners in San Domenico in Taormina; and also in the renowned modern restaurant, Antico Stabilimento Balneare, in Mondello and in the two wineries. During such dinners, the group socialized and built relations with one another while at the same time gaining an understanding of Sicilian culture through its cuisine. (See menus on page 12)

The trip follows the success of the first official trip of ASILM in Rome in November 2011. While on this trip, members met with the most prominent Italian officials at their headquarters. One of the most significant meetings was with President of the Italian Republic, the Hon. Giorgio Napolitano, at the Quirinale, during which the president recognized the significance of the Society and its mission. ■

*This was a very interesting and varied itinerary: we saw so much that we can say now that we have a good idea of what Sicily really is, with its incredible contrasted landscapes, its rich past and culture, and wonderful culinary art and traditions. We stayed at some of the best and historically most interesting hotels, and we were extremely well received everywhere. Only the weather was not always cooperating, but it did not temper our group's good humor and friendliness: we all enjoyed ourselves tremendously, and we are already looking forward to our next trip!"*

~Cav. Berardo & Mrs. Loyse Paradiso

ing which the president recognized the significance of the Society and its mission. ■



*Some members of the group pose at a look out on the way to Erice (L to R): Mrs. Loyse Paradiso, Cav. Berardo Paradiso, Dr. Paolo Andreoli, Ms. Kimberly Fry, Ms. Silvia Dondi, Mr. Vincent Mancini, Esq., Cav. Dr. Donna Mancini, Mrs. Lisa Salibello, Mr. Frank Desiderio, Esq., Mrs. Mary Ann Mattone, Mrs. Barbara Desiderio, Cav. Vivian Cardia, Mrs. Frances Massaro, Ms. Leila Massaro, Cav. di Gran Croce, Hon. Dominic Massaro and Comm. Salvatore Salibello.*



## A Few of the Many Memorable Dinners in Sicily

### Welcome Dinner at Donna Franco Florio, Villa Igiea, Palermo

Crunchy Sicilian caponata with medlar honey, soufflé of Sicilian cheese and anchovy balls in lemon leaves  
Pasta Norma with tomato and the addition of fried eggplant, salted ricotta cheese and basil  
Swordfish Palermitan style with pumpkin pie and anchovy sauce  
Sicilian cannolo with ricotta cheese  
Wine: Planeta, La Segreta 2010



### Antico Stabilimento Balneare, Mondello

Welcome Prosecco and appetizers  
Typical Sicilian tapas  
Home-made busiate pasta in Norma style, white fish, Bronte pistacchio Ricotta vularie  
Wines: Principi di Butera, Surya, Insolia 2012 and Principi di Butera, Chardonnay 2012



### Cantine Marsala Florio

Stewed little squid, Mazara del Vallo's marinated prawn, whitebait ball  
"Linguine" pasta with goatfish and wild fennel  
Dentex with aromatic herbs and cherry tomatoes and potatoes with almonds  
Sicilian oranges  
Ricotta cheese and almond cake  
Wines: Duca di Salaparuta, Colomba Platino, Insolia 2011; Duca di Salaparuta, Kados, Grillo 2011; Duca di Salaparuta, Bianca di Valguenera, Insolia 2009; and Florio Marsala Superiore Riserva Aegusa, Semisecco 1989



### Welcome Dinner at Hotel San Domenico, Taormina

Durum wheat macaroni sauteed with pumpkin and rosemary, flavored sausage, with fennel and black pepper  
Grilled and sliced beef fillet with endive and parmesan au gratin, potato quenelle  
Red wine cooked pear with crème brûlée glass  
Wine: Duca di Salaparuta, Passo delle Mule, Nero d'Avola IGT 2009



### Farewell Dinner at Hotel San Domenico, Taormina

Vegetable mould with parmesan, yellow pepper fondue  
Baked piglet with sauteed apple flavored with cinnamon and Nero d'Avola wine reduction  
Seasonal fresh fruit with citrus fruit mousse and lemon liqueur sauce  
Wine: Firriato, Etna Rosso D.O.C. 2010

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**48th Annual ASILM Gala  
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**February 20, 2014**



**For more pictures of the official  
ASILM trip to Sicily,  
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**[www.asilm.org](http://www.asilm.org)**



*Isola Bella, symbol of Sicily*

*Cavalieri* who receive honors and other recognitions should send information and a portrait photograph to:

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