

PRESS RELEASE

ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS CELEBRATE ITALIAN HERITAGE MONTH

**Freeholders Leonard Luciano & Brendan Gill Host Event
And Honor Nutley Mayor Alphonse Petracco and West Orange Mayor Robert D. Parisi**



Pictured above (left to right) Freeholder Vice President Brendan Gill of Montclair, West Orange Mayor Robert D. Parisi, Nutley Mayor Alphonse Petracco and Freeholder Leonard Luciano of West Caldwell co-sponsored and presented the Board's Commendations during the Board's Annual Italian Heritage Month Celebration. **PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON**

(Newark, NJ) – The Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders celebrated Italian Heritage Month during a ceremony held on Wednesday, October 7, 2015, at the Hall of Records. The event was hosted by District 4 Freeholder Leonard Luciano of West Caldwell and At-Large Freeholder Vice President Brendan Gill of Montclair. During the celebration of Italian culture and heritage, the Board honored the following outstanding Italian-American public servants: Nutley Mayor Alphonse Petracco and West Orange Mayor Robert D. Parisi.

Freeholder President Britnee N. Timberlake opened the program with a welcoming “buongiorno” to the audience. She recounted her great experience growing-up in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, New York, where she had the opportunity to enjoy the culture and contributions of Italian Americans of whom she has a tremendous amount of respect, not just in Essex County, but throughout the world. She thanked sponsoring Freeholders Luciano and Gill for their hard work in organizing the event as she welcomed all of the attendees to this year’s event.

Freeholder Leonard Luciano stated, “It always gives me a sense of great pride to stand and speak of my Italian Heritage. The story never becomes dull or boring when I look at the sacrifices that our ancestors made, and the adversities that they overcame to claim these United States as home. So, this evening I am proud to stand on their shoulders and continue the legacy of leadership and excellence as we celebrate Italian Heritage Month.” He recounted his personal story of his grandfather, Leonardo’s (for which he is named) migration to the United States at the age of 13 to the City of Newark’s Ironbound section. Eventually, settling down roots with his own family on their farm in Livingston where the freeholder’s father and 11 other siblings were reared. His father, the first to attend a college in his family, would become a school teacher. Freeholder Luciano followed in his footsteps and is also a school teacher. He encouraged those in the audience to continue to share their stories so generations to follow don’t forget the stories of our past and so that our heritage stays alive. “We are all American, but it is nice to be reminded that America was built by people from other countries and all parts of the world. I think that is especially important today” he said.

Mayor Alphonse Petracco was elected Mayor of Nutley in 2012 and within one month of his election was faced with the prospect of losing Nutley's largest tax payer, Hoffmann La Roche. Along with his fellow Commissioners, he worked tirelessly on a redevelopment plan that would generate similar tax income so as not to overburden the homeowners. They were happy to announce, Seton Hall University and Hackensack University Medical Center have joined forces to open a private medical school on the former Hoffman LaRoche campus in 2017. Mayor Petracco feels this to be a promising future for the residents of Nutley once it is occupied by a prestigious medical entity that will be second to none.

Mayor Petracco has been a business owner for many years starting with leasing and running the meat department at Foodarama on Washington Avenue in Nutley. While at this location, he established himself as a reputable businessman and because of its success, was able to expand the business to another location. After several years expanding both locations, he consolidated both stores, to what is now known as, Petracco and Sons, a vision that became a realization after many years of hard work and determination.

Taking a keen interest in volunteering in the township of Nutley, Mayor Petracco and has contributed by coaching Little League Baseball, Youth Basketball and lending a hand to many charitable organizations. He is also a member of UNICO, Nutley Elks and a Trustee of the Library Board. He was elected to the Board of Commissioners in 2008 and was appointed as Director of the Department of Public Safety overseeing Police, Fire and Emergency Rescue Squad.

Mayor Petracco was born in Belleville, New Jersey but grew up in Nutley, New Jersey where he has been a life-long resident and is married to his wife Fran, for 22 years, and they have three sons, Alphonse, Vincent and Salvatore. Mayor Alphonse Petracco continues to bring to the township of Nutley his business experience and innovative ways to help stabilize taxes while maintaining the quality lifestyle Nutley is known for.

During his acceptance of the Commendation, Mayor Petracco thanked the Board and County Executive for their support and friendship and for always stepping-up when called upon regarding issues with the Township of Nutley. He spoke of his beginnings in politics eight years ago, walking into the game of politics initially not knowing anyone, to now entering these chambers knowing everyone. He called his experience a "team-effort".

Freeholder Vice President Gill introduced the event's second honoree, Mayor Robert D. Parisi from the Township of West Orange, he stated, "He is someone that I have grown to respect and is certainly most worthy of this recognition.....at the helm of running one of our county's major townships, he is a business owner, he is a parent, and he certainly has his hand on the pulse of what makes our communities flourish."

Mayor Robert D. Parisi took the oath of office as Mayor on July 1, 2010, after serving 12 years as a Township Councilman and was re-elected as Mayor in November 2014. Mayor Parisi's vast accomplishments, on behalf of the Township of West Orange, exemplify a deep commitment to public service that began many years prior to joining the town council in 1998. During his tenure, he has advanced initiatives important to the environment, the arts, health & wellness, and senior services. He is a founding member and past president of the Eagle Rock Civic Association, a neighborhood civic group instrumental in the renaissance of the Eagle Rock neighborhood; is a founder of the West Orange Community Pride Project, which supports the efforts of community-based initiatives; led a campaign for voter approval to create the Open Space Trust Fund and is a strong proponent of the Township's Open Space preservation program.

Mayor Robert D. Parisi has championed the expansion and improvements of West Orange recreational programs and is a co-founder of the West Orange Alumni Association, a group that, under his leadership, raised over \$120,000.00 to build a new track and field complex and recreational facility at West Orange High School. Furthermore, he is committed to developing public-private partnerships to enhance the quality of life of all West Orange residents through various initiatives including a procurement of a \$125,000.00 sponsorship from a private pharmaceutical company to launch programming at the state-of-the-art Oskar Schindler Performing Arts Center. Mayor Parisi started his own company in 2008, RD Parisi Associates, a West Orange-based employee benefit consultant group. He learned the importance of leadership and community service through family ethics and values and has been an active, prominent member of the West Orange's civic, political and social sectors.

Working with the State and private foundations to secure funding for Senior Citizen transportation and the Commuter Shuttle, Mayor Parisi has spearheaded the effort to bring redevelopment to many areas of the Township, serving on both the Redevelopment Advisory Committee and the West Orange Downtown Alliance; and was instrumental in the redevelopment of the Main Street corridor, geared toward improving and revitalizing the downtown business district.

A life-long resident of West Orange, Mayor Parisi after graduating from West Orange High School, went on to earn a BA in English Literature from Rutgers University. He is married to Sheila Roth and they have two children, daughter Kelly and son Robert. He continues to serve West Orange proudly with a strong belief in community input and involvement, public/private partnerships, responsible redevelopment and fiscal responsibility while retaining the ‘best practice’ services that West Orange offers.

In his acceptance of the honor, Mayor Parisi gave a moving speech filled with vivid pictures of days gone by as he spoke of the hopes and dreams of a family’s quest for the American dream. He talked about his father donning a cliché-esk bomber jacket bearing the name of his social club the “Crusaders” and meeting his mother, a then teenager in Branch Brook Park. He told of his grandfather’s migration to America, a tailor by trade and who wore shirtsleeve and ties almost every day during his adult life. He told of the ideals and beliefs of his grandfather coming to America; with hard work one could be successful. He noted, when speaking of his grandfather, “He held tight to his Italian culture and had great pride in his Italian Heritage, but he came here to be an American. And 6 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren later, they are all a part of the American dream.” Mayor Parisi explained, his grandfather left Italy during a time of political upheaval, during World War II and “the very notion of his youngest grandson standing here today a Mayor, would be hard for him to comprehend....back in the city (Newark) where he spent about 50 years of his life.....I’m pretty sure that my grandfather would be proud of the American family that was born from his sacrifice.”

In an evening of stories, Freeholder Vice President Gill, reiterated to his friend and honoree Mayor Parisi, “Well said, and your grandfather would be proud of you.” He then recalled his own legacy, the story of his grandfather’s experience in this country as an Italian-American coming to this country in search of a better life. A man he never knew in life, but learned of his sacrifice to secure a brighter future for his family and the American dream.



Honorees West Orange Mayor Robert D. Parisi and Nutley Mayor Alphonse Petracco (center) are joined by (l to r) Freeholder Vice President Brendan Gill, County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., Freeholder Wayne Richardson, Freeholder Leonard Luciano, Freeholder Cynthia Toro, Freeholder Patricia Sebold, Freeholder President Britnee Timberlake and Freeholder Leby Jones during the celebration. **PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON**

Freeholders Gill and Luciano also welcomed representatives of the Nutley-Belleville Columbus Day Parade & Italian Heritage Committee, Inc., to the Freeholders' event, whose parade was held on Sunday, October 11th. President of the Parade Pasquale Meola, Parade Chairperson Rev. Father Thomas Nicasro, Jr., Co-Chair Edie Peters Liguori, Committee members Vito and Melissa Matturro, Vincent Cozzarelli, Susan LaMorte, Bill Freda, as well as the Committee's "Renaissance Man", Gerard Di Popolo, the "Belleville Man of the Year" Eugene Romano, and "Nutley Man of the Year" Alan Genitempo, Esq.

The celebration also included welcoming remarks from Essex County Democratic Chairman LeRoy Jones, County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo, and Rev. Thomas D. Nicasro, Jr., Parochial Vicar to St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Nutley, offered the opening and closing prayers. Attendees were entertained by the thrilling voice of 11 year old Master Gabriel de los Santos from the Jeffrey Carollo Scholarship Program at New Jersey Performing Arts Center, who favored the audience with two renditions and "*The Star Spangled Banner*". A catered reception for the honorees and their guests followed the program.

Freeholder Luciano has served District 4 on the Freeholder Board since August of 2011 and represents the towns of Caldwell, Cedar Grove, Essex Fells, Fairfield, Livingston, Millburn, North Caldwell, Roseland, Verona, West Caldwell and West Orange. Freeholder Vice President Gill served as District 5 Freeholder from 2012 to 2014 and currently serves At-Large on the Board.

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