

# Staten Island Advance

\$1.50 THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2017



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## DaVinci Society fetes five at Scholarship Dinner

**Raising funds for deserving students at Wagner College through a celebration of Italian culture**

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The Wagner College DaVinci Society observed Italian Heritage Month at its 14th annual Scholarship Dinner Wednesday evening in Nicotra's Ballroom at the Hilton Garden Inn, where nearly 300 guests gathered in support.

The affair that showcases Italian culture was chaired by Eleanor Conforti, a former chairwoman of Community School Board 31 and a Staten Island Advance Woman of Achievement. The event translates into a major fundraiser for scholarships presented to worthy Staten Island Italian-American students attending Wagner College on Grymes Hill. For their commitment to community, this year, the DaVinci Society honored former Borough President Ralph J. Lamberti with the Lifetime Achievement Award and Dr. Pietro Carpenito, Thomas Checchi and Catherine Tantillo with the Community Service Award.

Lina Fang received the Renaissance Award, presented to someone other than an Italian-American who is noteworthy for their commitment to making a difference on Staten Island.

In referencing the event, Mrs. Conforti noted: "This year's journal explains the mission and goals of the DaVinci Society and generated quite a bit of scholarship funding for our students."

And, in speaking of the Lifetime Achievement Award presented to former Borough President Ralph J. Lamberti, she added: "His whole family is here and his 16-year-old granddaughter will lead the Pledge of Allegiance, and his grandson, Ralph III, will speak about his grandfather. I call Ralph the 'Man for all Seasons.' He is truly deserving of the Lifetime Achievement Award. I never met someone who is so dedicated and committed to this borough. He really is deserving. When I worked for him as his special assistant at Borough Hall, I thought I could get fired. But in the DaVinci Society, he couldn't fire me," she added with a chuckle.



**From left, Charles D'Arrigo, Norma D'Arrigo, Aletta Diamond, Marcia Klein and Elaine and Dr. Dennis Bloomfield.** *Photos by Carol Ann Benanti, Staten Island Advance*



**Former Borough President Ralph J. Lamberti, honoree; Catherine Tantillo, honoree; Dr. Marianne LaBarbera and New York State Supreme Court Justice Philip G. Minardo.**



**Alice Diamond, former Borough President Ralph J. Lamberti, honoree; Norma D'Arrigo and Brian J. Laline, executive editor of the Advance.**



**Honoree Lina Fang, left, with Sam Farag, Harry Fang, Louise Tsui and Eleanor Conforti, event chairwoman.**



**Richmond County District Attorney Michael McMahon, with Eleanor Conforti and Deputy Borough President Ed Burke.**



**Dr. Richard Guarasci, Dr. Pietro Carpenito, honoree; Eleanor Conforti, Catherine Tantillo, honoree; Thomas Checchi, honoree.**

Said former Borough President Lamberti: "Being involved in the DaVinci Society was very rewarding for me because it gave me the opportunity to pay back to this community that was very good to me. I received so many letters from young people who received scholarships and they said they couldn't have gotten that opportunity if it weren't for the DaVinci Society. And I grew up like many of those young kids."

"We raised over \$1.1 million dollars and also had the assistance and help of the Columbus Citizens Foundation," he continued. "They gave many scholarships and putting it together we were getting matching funds and we did very well."

He added: "I'm very excited about my

award and very honored to receive it from Wagner College. Richard Guarasci has been a good chair and very supportive of me and what I did and how I did it."

Lamberti further noted that after they established the DaVinci Society and the Italian-American Awards, there were those of other nationalities and religions who were proud of what they accomplished.

"With the Renaissance Award over the years we've honored Irish, Polish, Filipinos and African-Americans," he said. "And, at the end of the day, if we get together, we will find out we have more in common than differences. And Richard has been very supportive of that."

Lamberti continued: "The award is an appreciation of not only me — but also all the people who supported the organization. I share it with them. It was great and everyone had a good time — typical Staten Island."

Guarasci explained that he's just completed 20 years at Wagner College. "The DaVinci Society means so much to Wagner College, a jewel on Staten Island," he said. "And it's because of all of you. Thank you for years of your support."

DaVinci scholarship recipient Charles Poveromo, a singer who's headlined at The Metropolitan Room and at the Friars Club, where he was inducted as the club's youngest member, provided musical entertainment.