

NUOVA VOCE Stand and deliver

Hard work has its rewards. Just ask Raffaella Spilotro-Guida and Angela Briguglio.

The local high school Italian-language instructors were handpicked by the Italian Consulate to represent the Chicago area at a groundbreaking youth conference in Rome.

"The Ministero Degli Affari Esteri and the Consiglio Generale degli Italiani all'Estero invited young adults of Italian descent from around the world to attend the first-ever Conferenza Dei Giovani Italiani Nel Mondo," Briguglio explains. "In all, 417 representatives participate, and we were lucky enough to be among them."

According to Italian Consul General Alessandro Motta, luck wasn't a factor. "They are two young professionals who are extremely passionate about their community," Motta says. "They have devoted much time to promoting their culture and language and were very deserving of the honor."

Briguglio, a Northeastern Illinois University graduate, teaches Italian at Wheeling High School and runs the Italian-language program at Casa Italia. Spilotro-Guida, a DePaul University graduate, teaches Italian at Oak Park-River Forest High School while running the school's Italian Club, Italian Exchange Program and girl's soccer team.

For a week last December, Briguglio, Spilotro-Guida and the other delegates gathered each day at the United Nations World Food Program Headquarters to discuss concerns, challenges and possible solutions to issues facing Italians and their descendents living abroad. Topics included the World of Work, Language and Culture, Identity and Multiculturalism, Representation, and Networking.

On Day 2, participants were divided into five working groups, with each group tackling one of the above topics, addressing and debating the issues based on their country's unique circumstances and needs. The groups prepared position papers that were presented to the ministry on the final day of the conference.

"Angela and I chose to participate in the Language and Culture group," Spilotro-Guida says. "As teachers, we perpetuate Italian language and culture every day. It was important for us to let the ministry know what the Italian language

means in the United States, why students choose to learn it, and how Italy can contribute to the continuation of teaching."

"The Italian government recently cut funding for Italian programs worldwide by about 50 percent, and we spoke about that," Briguglio notes. "We also talked about the problem of underqualified teachers and programs, and the suspension of the AP exam in the United States, which is detrimental to the credibility and continuation of Italian language instruction."

The pair urged the formation of schools around the globe where children of Italian descent can learn the language, geography, history and literature of their ancestors during their primary years.

The conference was both eye-opening and fulfilling for Spilotro-Guida and Briguglio.

"It was amazing the connection we had with Italian-Australians, Brazilians, South Africans, etc., etc." Spilotro-Guida explains. "Here were more than 400 young adults from around the world who were all speaking Italian to each other.

"Most of our families had immigrated to each country around the same time for the same reasons and facing similar struggles," Briguglio adds. "It was amazing to hear each experience and have it blend into one voice."

Delegates keep in touch via e-mail and Facebook and the 27 U.S. delegates gathered in March to continue to develop goals and objectives. "It's great to know that we have friends all over the world who share our concerns and are willing to do something about it," Spilotro-Guida says.



Raffaella Spilotro-Guida and Angela Briguglio traveled to Rome recently to represent the Chicago area at a landmark youth conference.

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