

Group touts Italian culture

Fieri is the name of the Providence chapter of an international group designed for students and young professionals who want to savor all things Italian.

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PROVIDENCE -- **Soprano Loriana DeCrescenzo took a sip of water and then tipped her head back and filled the ballroom on Federal Hill with a lyrical operatic song about the city of Sorrento and the beauty of southern Italy.**

The subject of the song and the fact that the executive director of Opera Providence sang in Italian and many in her audience couldn't understand her helped make her performance a perfect way to kick off a new Providence chapter of an international group designed for students and young professionals who want to savor the Italian language and culture.

The group Fieri, which means The Proud, introduced itself to about 50 Rhode Islanders during a reception Sunday night at Via Roma on Federal Hill.

The organizers include Salvatore "Sam" Brusco, a general contractor who grew up in Cranston and spent the last five years in Boston, where he enjoyed that city's chapter of Fieri.

"I came back here and I was surprised there wasn't one here," Brusco said. Past efforts to start a Providence chapter were unsuccessful, he said, and that surprised him in a city with so many Italians.

Another organizer, Richard M. Volpe II, recently graduated from the University of Rhode Island, where he helped establish an Italian fraternity and social club.

Also on the organizing committee are two bankers, Eugenio "Gino" Milano and Kenneth E. DiBattista III, and Michael Izzo, a contract specialist at Raytheon.

Bob Yantosca, came down from the Boston chapter for the event. After DeCrescenzo sang, he said, "This is what Fieri is all about: bring Italian culture to a roomful of people."

In his own case, Yantosca said he was raised by parents of Italian heritage who themselves were raised in the United States and didn't speak Italian.

"We never made wine at home, or canned tomatoes," he said.

Fieri has four key objectives:

To preserve the Italian culture and encourage the study of Italian and Italian-American history.

To foster the values of higher education and personal achievement in young Italian-Americans.

To facilitate career opportunities and networking relationships for young professionals.

To promote a positive image of Italian-Americans in the mass media and popular culture.

Yantosca said the Boston chapter likes to have meals where only Italian is spoken.

The new Providence chapter plans to host a dance party, schedule nights to look at videos of Italy and Italian history, bring in guest speakers and sponsor a WaterFire night.

Brusco said the group also wants to enlist an advisory board of older Italians. There have long been groups for older Italians, he said, but now would be a good time to have a group for younger people -- even for his age, 40.

"I want to explore my Italian heritage some more," he said. "And meet other people who grew up like me."

Providence Mayor David N. Cicilline stopped by to wish the group luck, and sign up as a member.

"Since we came here so early as immigrants, we sometimes forget to celebrate our wonderful Italian culture," Cicilline said.

For more information and ways to contact the organizers, go to www.FieriProvidence.org

The group is designed for the 18 to 40 age group. Non-Italians are welcome, and older people can join as honorary or donor members.

Brusco said he plans to have an advisory board of older Italian-Americans established by March and a viable new chapter up and running by August.

"We'll keep trying this until we make it work," he said.

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