

Our history

Just like every other story, ours is filled with bright and dark moments. The bright moments of our success and the dark of our flops. Both bestow to single individuals involved in the creation of this community organization known as “Federazione Calabresi dell’Ontario”.

But let’s start from the beginning.

Since when the first Calabresi immigrants arrived in Canada, they had the desire to stay together, to maintain alive the millenary culture and traditions that have always been an extremely important part of their lives, and which made them unique in the world.

They always distinguished themselves for their tenacity showed in facing difficulties presented by new lands, and to societies which welcomed them they always made available their talents, their will to work to give a better future to their kids and their will to believe in their values no matter what’s happening.

After the first years of adaptation, having learned the language and how the Canadian system works, they felt the urge to give themselves a structure to help them get together, socialize and interact, so they began to organize themselves in small groups under the flag of the original 'paesi', the Saints patrons of the area they were from, and their catholic faith.

Some attempts to organize themselves under the political affiliations they belong in Italy before coming to Canada didn’t have the hoped success, even though the experiences helped in the integration into the Canadian political systems.

In the mean time, with immigrants number in Canada from Calabria growing steadily, the need to accentuate their own individuality pushed many to think of an organization representing all Calabresi. After a few attempts, in 1984, under the guidance of Don Eugenio Filice, the CCC was created (Confederazione Calabro-Canadese).

The most important and public figures in the CCC were Don Eugenio himself, first president of the Confederazione, Benito Bellantone, Antonio Mazzotta, Mimmo Sisca and Antonio Nigro.

Sadly, personal ambitions’ of some of the members made the CCC fail, leaving the community without a Federation that would aim to represent them all.

As years went by, while the Club and Associations’ activities continued despite the fail of the CCC, the idea of being reunited under one confederation, without distinguishing between local roots, was still alive in the community, and growing thanks to the success of the founders of Villa Colombo and Columbus Centre.

Once again, in the 90s, the initiative of a group of Ontario politicians of Calabrese background, to build Casa Calabria failed right after receiving the green light for some financial help by different level of Governments. And once again, the

personal interests' and ambitions' of few made the iproject crash, and once again the community was left without a strong federation.

The hopes were turned on once again, thanks to the initiative of a Calabrese entrepreneur, nominated official representative of the Regione Calabria, on November 20th, 2001.

Basilico Policaro, in fact, promoted a meeting at Tony's Ballroom. Scores of Calabresi showed up in the hope of awakening the desire of a common community organization. Even many Calabresi who witnessed past attempts fail showed up: but they did not share anymore the enthusiasm of the past.

With the creation of a temporary consult, a long and difficult process started, mainly to pass the retrograde mentality of the people who thought the initiative was only for the few with personal aspirations and interests.

At the first Centro Calabria Festival, on September 22nd 2012, over three thousands people showed up to check out the Federation project.

At the same time a strong membership campaign culminated with the first public meeting, held in the Rotunda at Columbus Centre, on January 12, 2013. In a hall filled with proud Calabresi, the first draft of the statute of the Calabresi Federation of Ontario was approved, and the board of directors elected. Tony Silipo, former Ontario minister of Education, became the federation president.

Since then many successful initiatives were brought to life, often with the help of Suore Minime della Passione, who donated to the Federation a portion of land they received from the Ontario Government. The land was perfectly suited to develop a project such as Casa Calabria.

While all this happened, every Wednesday president Tony Silipo hosted a half and hour radio talk show where local personalities were invited to promote FCO and its initiatives.

Sadly, the program, which was supposed to bring the Calabresi together, and encourage them to work together for the benefit of the community, became a problem for the Federation, because of the poorly organized and managed projects, which didn't respect the deadlines, while the conflicts of interests of many personalities involved were creating and spreading distrust toward the organization.

At the end of the second term of Tony Silipo as President, Antonio Nicaso was elected new president of the FCO. He started a well managed fundraising campaign, with the help of other members of the executive, like Nick Lerfino and Domenico Servello.

The "Movie Nights", with the actors Tony Nardi and Nick Mancuso, and the visit of the ex Milan Soccer Player Rino Gattuso were main attractions of this campaign.

Very important were also the various Weekly Editions of "Saperi and Sapori",

coordinated by Gesualdo Mastruzzo with Franco Falbo, vice president of the FCO.

Even though there was a lot of will to do good and start the project, some misunderstandings with representatives of Suore Minime, made so that projects like Casa Calabria would never see the light.

And many hopes were destroyed.

After the end of the second term of President Nicaso, the assembly elected Tony Silipo as president once again. Unfortunately, Tony was diagnosed with an incurable disease soon after.

Nevertheless, even after a difficult surgery, he brought a new impulse to FCO's activities.

During this period, FCO board, on request by Tony Rizzo, conducted many meetings with representatives from Suore Minime della Passione, and important business figures within the Calabrese community. Mr. Rizzo was delegated to draft a preliminary document which, if signed, would have granted an agreement to bring new life to the project to build on their land the first portion of the dreamed-of "Casa Calabria" project.

After the document was drafted and signed by President Silipo on behalf of FCO, representatives of the Suore Minime della Passione then refused to sign, disowning what they had confirmed many times on different occasions to Mr. Rizzo and other members of FCO executive board.

The same day President Silipo resigned and left Toronto to visit Calabria, having received a clean bill on his health status.

After a few weeks he was forced to come back to Toronto for health reasons. He passed away 6 months later, his strong will defeated by a terrible disease.