



HISTORY of the SCRANTON CHAPTER of UNICO NATIONAL

Since the first chapter of UNICO National was organized in 1922 in Waterbury, CT, the organization spread to other cities in the East. In the winter of 1955, the Scranton Chapter of UNICO National was formed. Sponsored by the Hazleton Chapter, the Scranton Chapter application was founded by *Dr. D.J. Maldonato* and signed by the following: *J. Harry Morosini, Esq. John A. Morano, Esq., Vincent Russoniello, Dr. D.A. Santarsiero, W.M. Memolo, N.F. Gubitose, Dr. Benjamin J. Cottone, Frank Fricchione, Gaetano Toraldo, John Lambert, S.J. Defazio, Samuel C. Mastriani, Dr. D.J. Maldonato, Richard S. Campagna John C. Payne, and Francis P. Valverde, Esq.*

For over a half century, the Scranton Chapter of UNICO has been a leading service organization in the community. The Chapter is the largest in the country and is constantly planning activities that improve the quality of life in the area and also unites with UNICO National to help with National causes as well as organize events that promote positive Italian American culture and heritage both locally and nationally. The Chapter strongly supported local resident Neil Trama's contributions declaring October 12th as Columbus Day, a national legal holiday. Each year many members proudly march in New York City for the parade. Many standing committees allow members to become involved and an active Women's Auxiliary exists even though women are regular members of the Chapter.

Through the years, the Chapter has sponsored a variety of fundraising activities. Best-known for their involvement in *La Festa Italiana* held every Labor Day weekend in Downtown Scranton, is the sale of its now "*famous porketta*" sandwiches to thousands of festival goers. An annual Charity Ball is held at which time a member is recognized for outstanding service to the chapter and the community at large. The UNICO Soccer Cup featuring high school senior soccer players from the area and the Jim Minicozzi Memorial 5k Race/Walk are two sporting events.

As a means of accepting contributions restricted to charitable giving, the chapter formed the Scranton UNICO Foundation. Funds raised from events are deposited and the Foundation awards gifts to local and national charities. The Chapter provides scholarships to needy students who attend area colleges and universities including: University of Scranton, Marywood University, Penn State Worthington Campus, Lackawanna College, Keystone College and Johnson College. Proudly, to ensure that the Italian Culture will be preserved in the classroom, the Chapter endowed a program with Penn State Worthington, Dunmore in Italian Studies, Heritage and Culture. The group contributes to local libraries with capital improvement funds and by purchasing books that educate the positive contributions of Italian Americans.

An annual scholarship is also given to a Dunmore High School Senior who excels in the sciences. The award is in honor of Astronaut Paul Richards who flew aboard the Space Shuttle in 2001. He is an Honorary Member of the Chapter and a recipient of the prestigious Marconi Award by UNICO National in 2011.

Besides needy causes in the community, the Chapter contributes annually to many area charities: Allied Services programs for Autism, The Boys and Girls Club of NEPA, St. Francis of Assisi Kitchen, St. Joseph's Center, Children's Advocacy Center, Allied Services, Little Sisters of the Poor and Family to Family, to name a few. The group also donates to UNICO National charitable causes such as the *V Foundation* for Cancer Research, Cooley's Anemia, St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital, Mental Health projects and Anti-Bias projects and National Scholarships.

In 2013, the Chapter was the leading community organization raising funds to support the newly constructed, "St. Francis Commons", a housing project for homeless veterans. Many members of the Chapter are Veterans.

The Chapter aided Emmy-Award filmmaker Michael DiLauro with his documentary on Italian Americans during the WWII entitled "Prisoners Among Us". Proceeds from the film's debut benefited the Gino Merli Memorial Room in the Valley Community Library. Gino was a recipient of the Medal of Honor for bravery in WW II and an Honorary Member of the Chapter. The Chapter was the major financial supporter of two WVIA-TV original films: "Paesani" and "Ubaldo", documenting Italian Americans in Northeast PA. Local writer Stephanie Longo, a chapter member, has also received financial support.

Through the years, several members have served UNICO National in leadership positions and officers including three National Presidents, *Dr. Benjamin Cottone, (1971-72)* who also left a legacy to UNICO by endowing a memorial scholarship in his name, *Alfred Dante, Jr. (1979-80)* and *Christopher DiMattio (2010-11)* who has permanently endowed a national scholarship for students studying in Italy. Honorary clergy members include area natives, the late Most Rev. Joseph Ferrario Bishop of Hawaii, and the Most Rev. Robert C. Morlino, Bishop of Madison, WI. Other members and residents of the area have received prestigious UNICO National awards for outstanding service to their community.