

COSTI Immigrant Service opens 18th location

Annual report titled *Making Canada Home* shows organization's commitment to help all new Canadians

By Caterina Rotunno

Making *Canada Home* is the title of the recent COSTI Immigrant Service annual report presented on occasion of the opening of the organization's 18th location in the GTA, at 35 King Rd., north of Lawrence Avenue West and west of Weston Road.

COSTI Immigrant Service is an agency that for 60 years has been strongly committed to providing an array of services geared to welcoming the various immigrant communities, and accompanying them on a process of integration into Canadian society.

If Canada's multicultural model today represents a virtuous example for the entire world, it's also the credit of organizations such as COSTI Immigrant Service. Through its services, this organization has been able to lay down the groundwork for a model of society that, rather than assimilating or repressing those belonging to the various ethnicities and cultures, has been able to help them in the early stages of social integration, allowing them to become, in all effects, citizens able to express the best of themselves and their culture, thus contributing to Canada's growth, and recreating their new home in this land.

The origins and roots of COSTI Immigrant Service can be defined as Italian in that they're related to an organization formed in the early '50s, the Italian Immigrant Aid Society (IIAS). At the time, thousands of Italians were arriving from the Halifax port to Union Station in Toronto after a long and exhausting voyage by ship from Italy.

"Many didn't have a place to go, nor did they know what their future would be like in this new country where a language incomprehensible to them was being spoken," points out Bruno Suppa, current president of COSTI Immigrant Service. He too immigrated to Canada with his family in 1948, at the age of 12. He saw the birth of this organization, and has been an active participant since its inception. During the '50s, along with other young Italians, Suppa joined the Catholic association at Nostra Signora del Monte Carmelo Church on 202 St. Patrick St., which had become a gathering point and source of initial support for many Italian immigrants.

Together with other young volunteers from the Catholic association, president Suppa recalls, "they formed groups to meet these new arrivals at the station. Some needed shelter, others a job, others simply a warm meal. This went on for the entire decade, then the IIAS location was moved to St. Clair Avenue West. During the '60s, there was a change in the characteristics of Italian emigration: in contrast to the farmers and labourers who were arriving previously, skilled labour such as plumbers, electricians, hairdressers, etc. began entering the nation." According to Ontario law, to work in one's profession, a certificate of qualifications was required, which could only be obtained by passing an exam administered by the Province

At that point," Suppa recalls, "the then COSTI (Centro Organizzazione Scuole Tecniche Italiane,



(Italian technical school centre) as conceived by Father Joseph Carraro, was involved in the integration of our fellow nationals as far as language and career, organizing bi-lingual courses for the new Italian immigrants who, even having practiced their profession in Italy for years, required provincial certification to be able to work in Canada. The course instructors and teachers who Father Carraro initially recruited from his parish were mainly Italian, already established in Canada, and were able to teach English technical terminology relative to the respective professional sectors, necessary to be

able to pass the exam."

In 1966, COSTI entered an important agreement with Worker's Compensation Board (WCB), acquiring the task of professionally retraining workers who had suffered an on-the-job injury. It was at the end of the '60s and early '70s that, having been an organization involved mainly with Italian immigration, COSTI began making itself accessible to other communities that were beginning to arrive, from Asia, South America, and the Caribbean.

In 1981, the Italian Immigrant Aid Society (IIAS) was integrated into COSTI and in that same year



a "Centro Famiglia" (family centre) was set up, that included a psychologist and psychiatrist, to help Italian families with issues of adapting, and to help first generation youth deal with problems of drugs, violence, and alcoholism.

Since those years, COSTI Immigrant Service has been able to develop, notably amplifying the range of services offered to all communities and immigrants.

"For the opening of this new location, we wanted to focus mainly on employment-related services," COSTI director Mario Calla wishes to clarify, "to serve residents in a tough and economically depressed area of the city with very low average income, high unemployment, and with few social services. The range of services we offer at this new location are geared both to those who have lost their jobs and

need to find a new one by retraining, and to youth who have just finished high school and have to undergo the difficult search for a job. We help them with creating their resumes, the cover letter, we train them on how to deal with a job interview and we also guide them in the selection of job offerings through the appropriate data banks, by trying to understand their expectations and preferences. At our locations they can utilize all tools useful for this end goal, such as fax, computers, and connections with data banks. Since they cannot offer previous work experience, we provide them with three-month apprenticeships, to prepare them to take on their job activity."

Describing the programs geared to adults with work experience who find themselves without work and in need of retraining, Calla makes reference to the "Second Career Program established by the Province of Ontario, which subsidizes community college training programs after carefully analyzing job openings, with COSTI itself being delegated this task of supplying these types of services."

"As well as activity related to the employment area," the director continues, "our organization, as it has since its inception, sees to the welcoming and coaching of new immigrants in their process of integration into Canadian society, through the teaching of English ESL (English Second Language) with about 2,000 students present each day in our classrooms, with the search of a home, to an orientation service for the various bureaucratic applications up to, even this, to the selection and choice of a job activity and - something even more difficult for someone newly arrived - the understanding



Far left: Francis Nunziata, Bruno Suppa, Laura Albanese, Mario Calla. Left: new COSTI location at 35 King Road (Photo: Renzo Carnevale)

of the corporate culture of the Canadian system. All these services are possible thanks to the high competence level of the personnel at our 18 locations, who are able to communicate in over 60 different languages."

Funding for COSTI Immigrant Service is predominantly from public sources - both federal and provincial as well as from municipal government depending on the specific project. There's also private funding such as, the centre that welcomes and cares for refugees arriving to Canada: The Ralph Chiodo Family Immigrant Reception Centre.

"In addition to youth and immigrant services there are services for the elderly," said Frances Nunziata, York South-Weston councillor, who was present at the inauguration of the new centre she has been involved with since the planning and site location stages. In fact, Councillor Nunziata highlighted another important activity COSTI provides for the elderly who, often living alone, need help in what are normal administrative tasks like health care and pension-related applications.

Visiting the new King Street location and participating during the evening inauguration last Thursday, January 26, was Laura Albanese, York-South Weston MPP, who confirmed the importance of this new COSTI opening in that "our area presents a high number of newcomers to Canada who certainly are in need of this organization's help and services. As well, I have to say that it's wonderful to see that COSTI, born during the '60s to help a single community - the Italian one - now helps many communities throughout Toronto and the GTA." ♦