

Italian American Veterans Museum to bestow first-ever Lifetime Achievement Award upon Anthony J. Fornelli

There is no worthier recipient of the Italian American Veterans Museum's inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award than Anthony J. Fornelli. He has served at various levels of government; presided over half a dozen non-profits; raised or donated millions of dollars for charity; and earned nearly a dozen local, national and international honors.

The son of Gennaro, who hailed from Naples, and Madelyn, who "hailed from Calabria by way of Des Moines, Iowa," Tony grew up on Chicago's West Side, graduating from Our Lady of Angels Grade School and St. Ignatius High School.

After high school, he married and began raising a family that would grow to include five daughters. He took a job driving a meat truck while he pursued an undergraduate degree at Loyola University and a law degree at DePaul University.

Tony's career has been a complex tapestry of professional, political, civic and charitable involvement, with each thread complementing the other.

A former assistant corporation counsel for the city of Chicago, right-hand man to Congressman Frank Annunzio, and political organizer for the Democratic Party, he was appointed by Illinois Governor Dan Walker as director of the Department of Financial Institutions, a cabinet-level position charged with overseeing credit unions, currency exchanges and unclaimed property.

In 1976, he began a nine-year stint as a member of the Chicago Plan Commission, and in 1988, he began a seven-year tenure with the city's Zoning Board of Appeals.

Although Tony served as director of the Department of Financial Institutions for only two years, he earned the lasting respect of the industry. In 1977, he and a group of



ANTHONY J. FORNELLI

partners created a small chain of currency exchanges that grew to encompass 50 outlets in three states. He remains actively involved in the industry to this day. In 1998, Tony organized a group of investors and launched a payday loan chain that expanded to 50 outlets in half a dozen states in less than a decade.

Tony's impact on the Chicago-area Italian-American community has been immeasurable.

As a leader of the Chicago Amerital Chapter of UNICO National, he chaired Chicago's Festa Italiana for 18 years. The annual celebration raised more than \$1 million for a variety of charities, including the Neediest Children's Fund, Italian Earthquake Relief, the American Jewish Committee and Cooley's anemia research.

After the 1990 Census, when the only two U.S. congressmen to be redistricted out of office were Italian Americans, he and several other community leaders answered the call and formed the Italian American

Political Coalition to restore the community to its rightful place in the state's political landscape.

In 1996, when the community was in danger of losing its main communication vehicle, Fra Noi, he and a group of investors returned the paper to solvency. He currently serves as publisher of the magazine.

In 1999, he and a handful of other community leaders negotiated a lease with the Missionaries of St. Charles to convert the Sacred Heart Seminary in Stone Park into Casa Italia. Seven years later, he founded the Italian American Veterans Museum at the Casa. And for the next 10 years, he spearheaded a golf outing that raised more than \$200,000 for both entities.

Tony has presided over the Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans, Justinian Society of Lawyers, Italian American Political Coalition, Casa Italia and UNICO National. He has been honored by the JCCIA, Justinians, Gregorians, Italian American Executives of Transportation and Italian Cultural Center.

In the community-at-large, he has served on the boards of the Jane Addams' Hull-House Museum, International Museum of Surgical Science and Hall of Fame, National Hemophilia Foundation and Austin School for the Mentally Disabled. His alma mater, St. Ignatius, named its football field in honor of Tony. The Illinois State Bar Association, City of Hope, National Institute of Human Relations, National Hemophilia Foundation and the Prime Minister of Israel have all bestowed honors upon him.

His latest goal is to create a museum at Casa Italia dedicated to celebrating Italian American achievements in the sciences. Knowing Tony, that goal will soon come to fruition.