

## ***Cav. Joseph Coccia, Jr. Biography***



The Coccia Foundation was established in 1994 by Cav. Joseph Coccia, Jr. who aggressively pursued the preservation of Italian culture on two fronts.

Since 2000, Joseph had been pursuing the preservation of Italian culture full time, and in a short period of time recognized the need for an Institute of higher learning connected to a University in Italian Studies that would keep the legacy alive into perpetuity.

In 2003 Joseph, along with his wife Elda, founded the Coccia Institute for the Italian Experience in America at Montclair State University. The Institute partners with the National Italian Association Foundation of Washington, D.C., and the New Jersey Italian and Italian Heritage Commission on mutually beneficial programs. The Institute also celebrates Italian American Heritage Month each October, conducts an annual symposium for young adults; a summer program –Teatro Italiano- for children ages 6-12; and sponsors other events ranging from well-received business lectures and culinary presentations.

Under the direction of Montclair State University President Susan B. Cole, Dean Mary Papazian, Director Dr. Gina Miele and staff, the institute has established itself as a leader in Italian-American programming, education and outreach activities.

The Coccia Foundation, which was started in 1994 as the Joseph and Elda Charitable Foundation, has provided a wide range of philanthropic aid to an ever-expanding list of worthy recipients.

A short list of those they have supported include:

- In education: State colleges in New Jersey, New York, California. South Carolina and Community colleges in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.
- The establishment of Student Italian Clubs in many Colleges and Universities and Networking of same.
- Initiated an Italian Books Study Collection – Distribution to local libraries

- Scholarships, Grants, in support of Italian Study Abroad Programs as well as
- awards for annual achievements.
- Italian Studies Chairs in New Jersey, New York and California.
- Cultural programs through a number of schools, educational foundations, Italian and non-Italian organizations.
- Children's causes including Special Olympics, Hale House, the Make a
- Wish Foundation, and Rainbows.
- Deborah Hospital and Neonatal Intensive Care at Valley Hospital as well as providing funds for private medical expenses.
- Numerous Italian Culture Organizations, Foundations, and extremely worthy
- Catholic charities.

Proud of their accomplishments, Joseph and Elda realized that Italian culture is in the hands of today's children. Because of that, they are working on a cause very near to our hearts: Seeking to establish and encourage Italian Student Clubs and promote the teaching of Italian language, culture and heritage in as many universities and colleges as possible.

Cav. Joseph Coccia, Jr. was born in the east side of Newark, New Jersey in 1929 of Italian immigrant parents. His infant years were lived during the Great Depression. He attended schools in Newark, including Drake Business School before answering the call of his country by entering the US Army in 1951 serving in Japan and Korea and honorably discharged in 1953.

After returning home, he married his sweetheart, the former Elda Soriano. (born in Lioni, Provincia di Avellino, Italy) They raised their five children and are proud grandparents of nine grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

The recipient of numerous awards, Cav. Joseph Coccia, Jr. is proud of his many accomplishments:

- **Lifetime Silver** honorary membership in the **New Jersey State Police** Benevolent Association, the only civilian to receive such an honor in 70 years of its existence due to a successful fundraiser in obtaining 140 bullet proof vests for local police officers.
- Initiator of symbolically naming Route 80 – Christopher Columbus Highway
- **UNICO NATIONAL - President**
- Decorated with the medal of Cavaliere in the **Legion of Merit presented by the Republic of Italy** for extraordinary fundraising in the earthquakes of 1976 and 1980 (Friuli and Mezzogiorno).
- The **Dr. Anthony P. Vastola Medal** – UNICO NATIONAL highest award to a member.
- **Honorary Citizen** – Boys' and Girls' Town of Italy
- **Initiator of Italian Chair** at Montclair State University
- Receiving of the **Doctor of Letters Degree** from Montclair State University

- Country Award – **Catholic War Veterans** - New Jersey
- **Personal Papal Blessing** – His Holiness Pope John Paul II
- **“LO STIVALE D’ORO AWARD”** – Associazioni Italiana **“IERI OGGI DOMANI”**

Over the years Cav. Joseph Coccia, Jr. has served on dozens of organizational committees through his many involvements; in his profession, and in the Italian community. Known as a humanitarian of expansive dimension, it would be possible, but not feasible to list all his accomplishments. However, once you read about Joseph and his memberships and participations, you will also ask the question: “Is there only one Cav. Joseph Coccia, Jr.?” To this day, Joseph continues to serve others beyond himself in the true spirit of humanity.

“Our vision was a vision of need...an official entity whereby children, students, adults, scholars, organizations can call on to assist in their furtherance of our rich Italian heritage...prior to its fading or being lost in history.”

*Cav. Joseph Coccia, Jr.*