Professor Becomes Honorary Citizen of Ancestral Birthplace in Italy

With great civic pride, a small medieval village 50 miles inland from Naples in the province of Benevento, Italy, paid a singular tribute to one of its “native sons.” In November, the village of Fragneto L’Abate (pop. 1,200) honored Indiana University Bloomington’s Nino B. Cocchiarella, emeritus professor of philosophy, by making him a cittadinanza onoraria and presenting him the keys to the village. Although Cocchiarella himself was born in New Jersey after the family immigrated to the United States, his father and generations of paternal ancestors have lived in Fragneto L’Abate for close to a thousand years—attested by the fact that about 50 percent of the population carry his family name.

The village, proud of those fragmatelli who have gone out into the world and distinguished themselves, honored Cocchiarella for his internationally recognized scholarship in logic and philosophy, as well as for his continuing pride and devotion to his ancestral home and roots in Fragneto L’Abate. He expressed these feelings in a message sent to the mayor on the occasion of a yearly festival to which he had been invited but was unable to attend: “When families extend beyond the borders of the village, even to other lands across the seas, their roots are still in the village, and the village lives on even in those who live far away. We are bound together, Fragneto L’Abate, my family and I, and the roots that I have there nourish me even to this day.”

The colorful ceremony at the village’s Casa Comunale (municipal building), festooned with U.S. and Italian flags, was attended by citizens and dignitaries, including mayors from nearby villages and officials from the province. Afterwards, a symposium, “Logica, logica matematica, logica filosofica: i contributi di Nino B. Cocchiarella,” was held to discuss his work, led by Michele Malatesta, a professor of logic and philosophy of the University of Naples, Federico II. Cocchiarella was also cordially welcomed as a distinguished visitor by the president of the province of Benevento, Carmine Nardone, who presented him with a gift. In return, Cocchiarella presented the village with an official testament of thanks with the IU seal, some books about Bloomington and IU, and two of his own books.

The following day, Cocchiarella gave an invited lecture at the University of Naples, Federico II on “The Problem of Universals from the Modern Logic Standpoint: A New Perspective and Solution.” Antonio Nazzaro, president of the faculty; Giuseppe Cacciatore, director of the Department of Philosophy; and Malatesta all spoke of Cocchiarella’s work and presented him in turn with copies of their works, as well as books about the history of Naples and the university. Cocchiarella also received an engraved pin of Federico II worn by faculty members and given to distinguished visiting professors.

Cocchiarella’s tribute was reported in the Benevento newspaper Il sannio and nationally in Corriere, which carried a long interview with him about his return to his ancestral home. They asked what it was like to be back and what he thought about the “brain drain” of young Italians coming to the United States to study but then staying on to work and settle down. The interviewer also asked why Italian students should study logic in today’s competitive global economy. Cocchiarella pointed to its fundamental role in reasoning and evaluating arguments in math, science, economics, law, information technology, and even in everyday life situations.

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