Address by Mr. Emilio Locilento (co-proprietor, "Tutto Italiano," the famous Italian food import shop and bakery of Hyde Park, MA and sponsor (together with his family) of the new annual prize for excellence in Italian Studies by an undergraduate Italian major or minor, "The Tutto Italiano Award"

Boston College, Department of Romance Languages Annual Awards Ceremony, May 6, 2013

Dear friends, faculty and students,

Let me begin by sharing some thoughts I expressed in an email to the members of my running club, having run Boston four times myself, the day after we witnessed the events unfold at the Boston Marathon. I wrote that morning:

“When I return to my father’s village, I run in desolate places outside the center of town admiring the landscape of rolling hills and the ruins of a medieval castle. The immensity of the sky and distant mountainous horizon remind me of how minute we are. As I move along, I am keenly aware of how there is nothing but a beating heart keeping me alive and part of my surroundings. Where is the humility, the sense of our fragility that should make us compassionate and resolute in the preservation of human life and dignity as opposed to its destruction for nefarious ends? Despite all our progress in technology, there are elements within us that have yet to attain the wisdom that we are far more alike than we are different. I will never forget the terror unleashed at the Boston Marathon, but I can also assuredly say that I am far more resolute in my beliefs than I have ever been. If we wish to succeed and move forward as a species, we need to maintain the passion and stamina of marathoners towards the goal of a safer more tolerant world where others are celebrated rather than reviled.”

The way in which I reacted that day allowed me to better understand the reason why I contributed to Boston College in establishing an Italian studies award to honor my parents. In the years since I left this campus, a decade ago, I have always turned to the words of the great Italian writers to inform me and inspire me. Their works, by putting into verse and prose the essence of my family’s most deeply held convictions, celebrate the best of the human condition: greatness through creativity transcending our inevitable mortality, a constant reminder to me that we are but a small thread of a much greater tapestry. We are, in essence, nothing more than, as the poet Giuseppe Ungaretti put it, “una docile fibra dell’universo” or a delicate fiber of the universe. That is the purpose of a liberal arts education, for if we can understand Michelangelo’s need to paint the Sistine Chapel or Dante’s need to write the Divine Comedy, it is a never ending source of inspiration and wisdom. We live in an age that is perpetually more dominated by technical knowledge with our productive and destructive capacity increasing from year to year. To ignore the voices of the past is to deny ourselves of a timeless voyage into our own humanity and of an important tool to temper the excesses of passion and arrogance. Where science and technology do not have the answers, art and literature find their rightful place. People often ask me why I studied the
Italian classics given the fact I live in the United States and my profession is far from literary. I often respond:

Can you imagine the moon without Giacomo Leopardi’s poetry, love without Francesco Petrarca’s sonnets, moral indignation without Dante Alighieri’s voyage through the rings of hell, an evening of storytelling with the best of friends without Giovanni Boccaccio’s novellas, the chaos of modernity without Italo Calvino’s critical essays and parsimonious novels, the crisis of personal identity without the theatre of Luigi Pirandello, the political landscape without Niccolò Machiavelli’s reflections on governance? How could I have ever lived?

My education energizes me day after day to seek new and elegant solutions to practical problems and to have the openness of mind to continue learning while tempering my ambitions by inserting them into a wider and relevant context. My only advice to students in their post collegiate lives is to keep their studies alive within them. Properly understood, the liberal arts are the key to a meaningful, productive life, whatever profession they may choose, in turn contributing to a better society as a whole. We often forget that there are the tasks of a job and there is the art of a job. Those of us who discover through dedication and introspection the art of a profession succeed in transforming work into personally enriching play. May we strive to be part of the words which close the Divine Comedy, 'L’amor che muove il sole e le altre stelle,' the love which moves the sun and the other stars.

Grazie!

--Emilio Locilento (Boston College, M.A. in Italian Literature, 2003).

Emilio Antonio Locilento was born in Hoboken, NJ. He attended Memorial High School in West New York, NJ and later Dedham High School upon moving to MA. He earned his BA at Tufts University graduating summa cum laude and as a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Society in 1994. From 1997 to 2003 he attended Boston College to receive his MA in Italian literature. He currently resides in Dedham, MA managing his family business, Tutto Italiano, with his sister Marilena and his father Angelo.

The Tutto Italiano Award for Excellence in Italian Studies

The "Tutto Italiano" Award is given each year for excellence in Italian studies to a graduating senior who has majored or minored in Italian. The prize was established by the proprietors of "Tutto Italiano" of Hyde Park, Emilio Locilento (BC, M.A., Class of 2003) and his sister, Marilena Locilento, in honor of their parents Angelo and Maria, for their love of education and free enterprise, a spirit that shall endure into the 21st century and beyond.