Bestowed upon me was the great honor of being able to attend the 44th annual luncheon gala by the National Organization of Italian American Women (NOIAW). Founded in 1980 and still going on forty-four years strong, this organization passionately strives to continue preserving and paying tribute to Italian roots and heritage. It also passionately lives to recognize and celebrate the achievements of Italian American women. NOIAW continues to keep Italian roots alive through unity, educating and actively encouraging others through engaging in culture, and through supporting and aiding in the personal and professional development of future generations to come.

I have encountered yet again, the realization that unity serves as a segue into keeping cultural and ethnic roots alive. A profound presence of unity was felt throughout every space and among every person present at the NOIAW event. Every space had been occupied by proud Italians and Italian-Americans, with each so willing to share their time and energy to be present a day of celebrating Italian/Italian-American heritage as well as the women of Italian ancestry, especially, those who have been so dedicated to creating and advocating for a platform where women of Italian ancestry can effectively address issues affecting their community, with their voices amplified. This organization evokes a profound sense of belonging not only for Italians and Italian-Americans, or the women who share this ancestry, but for anyone with a passion or interest for rich-history, culture, and heritage, or anyone on the path of discovering what culture and heritage means for them and their identity. Through meetings and events such as the NOIAW gala luncheon, people can make connections with each other, collaborate, and continue to build bonds. Whether they are authors of Italian ancestry or authors of Italian ancestry that write about the impact of their roots to their identity, or successful and aspiring entrepreneurs or artists, filmmakers, professors, students, or simply descendants, widespread connection is evident. This event allows for bonding with one’s own cultural roots and heritage as well as with each other, further strengthening the liveliness of culture and heritage. This event is especially significant for the togetherness of Italian women and Italian-American women. This event further allows for empowerment of women’s’ Italian and Italian-American identity, shedding light on the importance of defending and preserving their identities in the face of life and the many events that attempt to challenge their truth through stereotypes and traditional expectations of female roles. I observed that everyone was firmly connected through an invisible force that manifests through their presence, efforts, and openness towards each other, with that invisible force being a great passion of identity. Evidently, gratitude is a common characteristic that
prevails and is shared throughout as the people exert great appreciation for the culture that unites them.

Through educating and actively encouraging others to engage in culture and heritage, roots are kept alive and strong within and without. In its 44th year, NOIAW continues to play a pivotal role in the shaping of one’s identity as the importance of cultural awareness and preservation is brought to light. By taking initiative of delving deeper past the superficial aspects of one’s culture, such as stereotypes, fixed barriers are broken down and identity can be redefined. By learning the truth of one’s cultural roots, one can develop courage to defend their identity and culture against stigmas and stereotypes, just as the persistent women of NOIAW, who were once belittled and not thought to breach the expectations of being nothing more than a housewife.

A prominent figure associated with NOIAW is Jodi Pulice, recipient of the 2024 Distinguished Woman of the Year Award from NOIAW, who founded her own successful women-owned realty group JRT Inc. after having to navigate through the biases and challenges in a field dominated by men. Figures such as Jodi Pulice invoke inspiration to stay determined in the journey of elevating oneself. NOIAW offers a wide range of opportunities that allow for the strengthening of connection with one’s own roots through the many cultural events and gatherings NOIAW celebrates culture, tradition, language, history and especially the achievements of women of Italian ancestry. NOIAW has taught me that through education and actively engaging in the discovery of the many aspects of culture, one is brought closer to their greater truth.

I also realize that part of NOIAW’s mission is to support and aid in the personal and professional development of Italian American women and for generations to come. NOIAW has great influence on the development of leadership skills as the organization provides for a safe, progressive, and proactive environment where Italian and Italian-American women are encouraged to voice their concerns to resolve ongoing issues.

Additionally, present at these events and gatherings are honorable role models such as Sister Bernadette Anello of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, otherwise known as the Cabrini Sisters. Sister Bernadette emphasizes the importance of the qualities of courage, compassion, warmth, and resilience that can have great impact on the lives we encounter. Embodying such humility, compassion, and gratitude, in her prayer, Sister Bernadette looks to God the Father to further guide us in inspiring ourselves and others to help make the world a better place. She sheds light on the belief that we are companions on this journey of life united through the birth from our creator. She also makes an effective effort to remind others of the wise words of St. Paul to the Philippians “I can do all things through Him who gives me strength,” (Philippians 4:13), which profoundly relays the message that through keeping faith alive and restored within ourselves, we can endure through hardship and conflict. There is also a
wide range of successful professionals who do not fail to encourage the educational and professional pursuits of others. NOIAW and its supporters, provides great support through mentoring and funding scholarships that further enable personal and professional nurturing for Italian and Italian-American women. Surely present is a great community of people who encourage unity, personal and professional growth.

In conclusion, NOIAW has left a warm imprint on my life by gifting me an opportunity to have an experience that allowed me to see the beauty of unity and connectivity, the beauty of discovering, retaining, and exercising cultural roots and heritage, as well as the beauty of passion and support while on the everchanging path of personal and professional development.