

Italian-American World War I Hero Honored on March 25

Michael Valente emigrated to the United States from the Italian town of Sant' Apollinare, enlisted in the New York National Guard, and went on to win the Medal of Honor for extraordinary bravery in action on September 29, 1918 – the only Italian-American to be awarded the nation's highest medal for valor in the First World War. This March 25, National Medal of Honor Day, a ceremony in Valente's home town will celebrate the renaming of a bridge in his honor.

The christening of the Michael Valente Memorial Bridge will take place at the Long Beach (Long Island, New York) City Hall at 11 AM. This elegant span, formerly the Long Beach Bridge, connects Long Beach to the South Shore of Long Island. On hand for the event will be members of Congress and the New York State legislature, Long Beach city officials, representatives of Sons of Italy lodges, and author David Laskin, who wrote about Valente's acts of heroism in his highly acclaimed book *The Long Way Home: An American Journey from Ellis Island to the Great War* (Harper Perennial paperback, www.thelongwayhomebook.com). It was Valente's bravery that led to the penetration of the Germans' supposedly impregnable last line of defense – the Hindenburg Line.

Nassau County legislator Denise Ford (R-Long Beach), who was instrumental in the bridge renaming, comments, "Just as someone like Rosa Parks became a face for the Civil Rights movement, renaming a bridge after Mike Valente puts an important name and face on an important historical event."

Laskin, who will speak at the event about Valente's journey from poor immigrant to war hero, notes that "Mike was a humble, affable guy who exploded in rage when he saw German machine guns mowing down his buddies. He never forgot his Italian roots and was proud all his life to represent the Italian-American community at official events and presidential inaugurations."

Other speakers will include Valente's grandson Ralph Madalena, who spearheaded the bridge renaming, Representative Ford, and Sons of Italy lodge presidents. Copies of *The Long Way Home* will be available for purchase.

For more information, contact Ralph Madalena at rjmadalena@aim.com or David Laskin at www.thelongwayhomebook.com.