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DINING

Documentary film to focus on the history of Detroit's chefs: Watch the trailer



[Susan Selasky](#)

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Director and producer Keith Famie with restaurateur Joe Muer Jr. *Provided by Keith Famie*

A new documentary is in the works from Keith Famie, a local award-winning producer and director and chef, that will showcase the culinary heritage of metro Detroit's chefs, many of them master chefs, its restaurants and the hospitality industry.

"Detroit's culinary heritage is as important to our city's story as the automobile," according to the film's overview.

Famie and Tony and Mary Schimizzi are the executive producers for "[Detroit: The City of Chefs](#)" a Detroit Public TV documentary.

"I've been wanting to tell this story for 20 years," Famie recently told the Free Press. "These were the guys that were the hot chefs in the '80s and '90s."

And in order to talk about and chronicle Detroit's rich chef and culinary history, Famie who is also a chef, needed to go way back — beginning with the many immigrants who came to Detroit.

"It began in the 1960s, with Detroit on overdrive — General Motors, Ford and Chrysler were expanding globally and executives from these industry giants, thanks to extensive work-related travel, became savvy, adventurous diners with a love of fine wine and professional service," according to the film's overview.

Those interviewed for the film include both past and present culinary influencers: some of Detroit's most recognizable chefs who molded metro Detroit's culinary scene decades ago as well chefs and restaurant owners who are shaping it today.



Keith Famie and Joe Muer Jr. *Provided by Keith Famie*

And Famie knows the story well because decades ago he was part of that group of young and upcoming chefs in metro Detroit.

Many of those chefs worked with and learned from well-known European chefs like Milos Cihelka from Czechoslovakia, French-Canadian chef Douglas Grech, known as "Chef Duglass,

Duglass," and Yvonne Gill, who hailed from New Zealand, Famie said. Cihelka, now 93, is featured in the film, and is known as the "godfather of chefs" in metro Detroit.

The film trailer, narrated by Chuck Gaidica, formerly of WDIV-TV (Channel 4), features Joe Muer, Cihelka and Joe Vicari of Joe Vicari Restaurant Group, which includes Andiamo Italian eateries and Joe Muer Seafood. Others featured are Brian Polcyn, Mary Brady, Luciano DelSignore and Shawn Loving.

"Detroit: The City of Chefs" will also examine how Detroit's chefs and restaurants played a role in supporting local charities, the ethnic community and food purveyors and the front-of-the-house maitre'd leadership.

The film, Famie said, "will step back in time. "

"The auto industry drove a lot of the expectations from a global standpoint because executives traveled around the world," Famie said.

The film will take viewers to iconic restaurants at country clubs, Famie said, like the Detroit Athletic Club (DAC), Pontchartrain and the London Chophouse.

"There was a key point in time when things changed in the '50s and '60s with Duglass, Duglass, Milos and Yvonne Gill," Famie said. "They brought a new feel of professionalism. That expectation, that drive for cooking that set the foundation for who we are today."

Cihelka, Famie said, was responsible for creating and founding in 1970 the Michigan Chefs de Cuisine Association, a professional organization for chefs.

The film will also highlight the role and impact of metro Detroit's culinary arts schools including Schoolcraft College with its many master chef instructors, the culinary arts programs at Oakland Community College and Macomb Community College. Also featured will be those who wrote about Detroit's evolving food scene.

"As the second generation of chefs, the brat pack if you will, were developing a new style, so were the food writers," Famie said. "They were learning to write about food."

The film is due out in the fall of 2024.

To learn more about the film, go to detroitcityofchefs.com.