



DINING NEWS

# Shining a Light on Chefs

Keith Famie talks about his upcoming documentary celebrating Detroit's cuisine and its makers

BY JACK THOMAS

You may have dined at one of Farmington Hills-born Keith Famie's renowned metro Detroit restaurants in the '80s or '90s (Chez Raphael, Les Auteurs, Forte). And you may have seen him as a *Survivor* finalist. What you may not know is that he is a Michigan Emmy-winning director-producer who is currently working on an upcoming Detroit Public TV documentary, *Detroit: The City of Chefs*, set to premiere later this year. We caught up with him in January, after his Legends of the Stove event at the Detroit Athletic Club, a charity dinner prepared by an all-star, multigenerational lineup of metro Detroit chefs. The event will appear in the documentary, along with stop-motion animation sequences produced by students at the College for Creative Studies.

**Hour Detroit: What can viewers expect when watching *Detroit: The City of Chefs*?**

Keith Famie: The film is not just about the historical relevance of the culinary industry, but it's also about the current relevance of our culinary industry in Detroit and the individuals carrying it forward. It's going to be a fairly rich story, kind of like an onion with a lot of layers to it.... The Italians, the Poles, the Irish, the Germans, the Lebanese — this vast, rich culture of ethnic groups that came here, they brought their cooking styles and ingredients, and that built who we are today, which is pretty significant.

**How did the Legends of the Stove dinner come about?**

In [*Detroit: The City of Chefs*], there's a story unfolding about how in the '70s, chefs started coming out of the kitchen ...

to start cooking at socially charitable events. And I think charities figured out, "Wait a minute — if we want to have a really successful event, what if we just invite chefs to cook?" And so that became just a mainstay. So, my thought was, "Let's do a chef's charity dinner. What if we bring together as many of the old guards and current new ones as possible?" Then it was like, "Well, there's only really one place we should be doing this that is the most historical culinary landmark in our state — the Detroit Athletic Club."

**How does the automotive industry play a part in the film?**

The automotive executives in the '50s and '60s started doing a lot of traveling. And as they traveled around the world, they were able to refine their palate; they were able to see a whole range of new cooking styles. Well, they brought

those interests and those passions back here and almost kind of challenged chefs, if you will. Back then, the only places you could really go to get a meal of that nature, that creativity, and that quality of ingredients were clubs and hotels. And eventually restaurants flourished from that.

**What will the animated sequences look like?**

People think of chefs as staunch and serious. But by nature, we're whimsical. So I felt that a fun way to open the film was to create a whimsical moment, almost [like] Pinocchio and Geppetto. So [for the animated sequences] we've got [figurines of] a master chef, pastry chef, and a master baker working on this elaborate cake. The whole opening of the film is the chefs using utensils and bowls to make one cohesive piece of music that comes to life. And then we're going to use the

same chef lookalikes to close the film with a special endearing message in memory of those who've passed on.

**What do you think sets Detroit apart from other cities in the culinary field?**

Detroit has always been considered this kind of "flyover community" to New York or LA. So, I think our chefs here kind of ... they know there's more at stake. I think they really want to make it known that we're as good and as hardworking, as creative, as professional as anybody in the country. Detroit, and Michigan, have a lot to be proud of when it comes to our culinary heritage.



Generations of leading Detroit chefs and restaurant professionals pose at the Legends of the Stove event in the Detroit Athletic Club.