

Washington Observer-Reporter

Dine online

Local cooking class draws wide audience with Internet webcast

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Jason Capps is taking his cooking classes on **the** road - **the** Internet highway, that is.

The owner of Bella Sera by Greco's and Greco's Gourmet Catering **in** Cecil Township has launched "**Meet Me in the Kitchen**," a live webcast of his cooking classes.

Aside from a few glitches involving microphones, a beta test conducted last month during his Italian Wine and Cuisine class went off virtually (pun intended) without a hitch.

A production crew hustled around Bella Sera's elegant main dining room a few hours before **the** class began, running cables and setting lights.

Folks elsewhere who had been e-mailed **the** link for **the** test webcast, along with **the** menu and list of ingredients, were gathering **in** their **kitchens**, laptops at **the** ready, preparing to follow along **in** real time.

Camera Bartolotta, who is directing and producing **the** webcast, estimated that some 500 people would be watching, some from as far as South Korea, Wales, Alaska and California.

"If you can't come here to see, smell, taste, enjoy **the** wines - **the** whole thing - you can do it from **the** comfort of your own home **in** real time," she said.

Before taking his spot on **the** set, a calm and relaxed Capps noted that **the** classes, held since 2001, "are live without a net every time.

"We have an agenda; it's not random or disorganized," he said. "But we go off **the** cuff."

The key to his cooking classes, Capps said, is ensuring that all of **the** ingredients are available locally, and are for dishes that class participants will want to make at home.

"They need to be recipes you actually want to embark upon," he said. "People appreciate **the** simplicity of **the** recipes, or **the** little twists." As an example, he referred to a recent class on comfort foods **in** which he made macaroni and cheese, switching up **the** tried-and-true comfort dish a bit by adding potatoes and a little truffle oil.

While **the** spring cooking classes at Bella Sera end May 13 with **the** annual Grillin' & Swillin' event, Capps plans to host at least one webcast a month through **the** end of **the** year. Topics will vary, and will include healthy cooking, vegetarian cooking newlyweds and hosting wine dinners, to name a few.

As Capps, Bella Sera executive chef Adam Gooch and wine expert Roland Marandino embarked on their lesson **in** Italian cuisine, **the** image being streamed around **the** world via Internet was also being projected on **the** wall above **the** cooking set.

"This is our second best turnout," Capps told **the** class of about 75. "It's kind of like a world premiere."

With that, Marandino, ambassador for Cecchi and Sartori Italian wines, raised his glass aloft for a toast.

"At every Italian meal, how do you begin?" he asked. "Cin-cin (pronounced chin-chin)!" **the** class enthusiastically replied, toasting one another.

Capps, Gooch and Marandino moved seamlessly from course to course, revealing shortcuts - like substituting time-saving wonton wrappers for homemade pasta dough - and assorted cooking tips.

Midway through **the** class, a question came **in** via cell phone, prearranged by Bartolotta to test **the** ability to field calls from webcast viewers. A moderator will be on hand to determine which questions or comments to take, and also can be asked through e-mail or Twitter.

Bartolotta is not new to producing cooking shows. **The** former actress teamed up with chef and Pittsburgh native Vito DiSalvo to produce **the** cooking show "La Dolce Vita," which aired **in** 2004 and 2005 on WPXI and PCNC television networks.

She met Capps at an event at Bella Sera **in** November, and learned that he was interested **in** hosting his own cooking show.

"With **the** Web being what it is - this phenomenal animal that can do anything - I thought what about doing a live webcast of your cooking classes," she said of her conversation with Capps.

"You don't have to put one more day of work **in**. You don't have to buy more ingredients. People come to you. They click **in**, they pay a couple

bucks. They log on, and they enjoy your cooking class with your gourmet chefs. And they can cook along with **the** gourmet chefs **in** their own **kitchen**."

It's a concept that Bartolotta says should "grow and grow and grow."

"People are getting back into **the kitchen**," she said. "And there's a whole generation of people who has no clue how to do anything but microwave. This speaks to a lot of people."

She referred to a group of friends **in** Tampa, Fla., who were e-mailed **the** menu, list of ingredients, tools and wine list and were going to use **the** beta webcast for an evening of entertainment.

"It's a nice, entertaining evening for nearly zero financial commitment," she said.

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