

Cooking with 'love and passion'

Meals are family affairs for Station Square chef

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When Ottavio Musumeci moved to America 13 years ago, he had "zero" English.

But at the time, all he needed were his skills as a chef. And maybe his wife, Bridget.

Now he owns Station Square Ristorante. The couple have a home in Howland and four children.

Article Photos



Ottavio and Bridget Musumeci show the food just prepared at their Howland home. Ottavio Musumeci is chef and owner of Station Square Ristorante in Liberty. From the front, roasted Yukon gold potatoes; fall pork chops with fresh apple; on the left, risotto with zucchini and fresh garden herbs; right, Mediterranean shrimp; and in the back, fresh marinated berries.

Bridget Musumeci, then Esposito, a 1993 graduate of John F. Kennedy High School, went to culinary school and then to Italy, where she started with "zero" Italian. She said she learned the language by working in a restaurant and being submerged in the culture.

"He learned English when we met and moved over here," she said recently at her Howland home while the couple prepared dinner.

Ottavio Musumeci got a job at Vernon's, where he said the owner and a couple other people spoke Italian.

Twelve years ago, he took over Station Square, which he said had been "going down." He said he changed a lot of things and brought in a little more Italian style. He explained that there are 20 regions in Italy, and he offers a special from each one.

"Italian brings a lot of people in," he said.

One of his specialties is risotto, which is on the menu today.

"Risotto's a dish you can make a thousand different ways," he said. On his commercial stove imported from Italy, he browns the risotto, then exclaims, "Now we flambe!"

When the wine evaporates, it's covered with stock that's already warming.

"This is the easy part," he said. "Now I gotta let it go."

His wife uses a different method for risotto.

"You don't just leave it and it's done," she said. "You have to constantly stir it and add liquid."

She asks her husband, "There's not really one right way to do something, right?"

His dark eyebrows go up mischievously. "The way I do it is best the way."

Bridget Musumeci, who is now a full-time mom, said it was "amazing" working with him, and she misses that.

"It's great being in the kitchen together," she said. "But he takes charge - I become the sous chef."

For today's multiple-course meal, that's an important job.

"You can do everything - once you get everything cut up - in like half an hour," Ottavio Musumeci said. And "shrimp is so fast."

He said he has to be fast at the restaurant and do many things at once.

"It's full-speed adrenaline, then it slows down," Bridget Musumeci said.

"I like the rush," said her husband.

Other family members play their part, as well. Ottavio Jr., who is 10, chopped herbs from the family garden. Those herbs are also used at the restaurant.

The children are involved in the restaurant, as well, where Ottavio Jr. said he wraps potatoes and helps with the dishes. His brothers are Giuseppe, 12, and Giovanni, 7.

Musumeci said he and the children came up with the pork chop recipe after a visit to an apple orchard.

"It's a good marriage - apples, onions and cider," he said.

Once everything is on the table, daughter Giulia, 13 and a Kennedy eighth-grader, comes home from soccer practice.

"This is my beautiful daughter," Musumeci says, as he gladly makes her a plate.

In the meantime, a neighbor boy, Ian, has come over and helps himself to some shrimp. A little while later, his dad, Jeff Keel, is sitting at the table.

Keel, who himself makes a mean gnocchi from butternut squash, wants to tell Musumeci that a lady he knows recently ate at Station Square and plans to bring 20 people back with her.

Musumeci said the key to cooking - and people who ask for recipes but come back saying it's missing something get this advice, too - is "you gotta make it with love and passion."

The family recently hosted their annual fall party for 70 guests at home, and Musumeci is excited about the fifth annual clam bake set for Oct. 21 at the restaurant. After his mother visits from Italy for a first communion and a confirmation, the two older children will be going back with her for a visit.

The family's home and garden have a part in dinner in other ways. For example, the kitchen screen is temporarily on the dining room table being used to dry peppers. The provolone cheese, already aged two years, was aged another year at home.

And there's Musumeci's pride and joy - the wine - which was recently featured in Wine Spectator magazine. In fact, it's already been poured.

"When you cook in the house, you have a glass of wine," he said.

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