

Famie serves up a new look at the Polish community

Most people around these parts would recognize Keith Famie as being a top-flight chef, or for the stint he did on the TV series *Survivor*.

But his already diverse resume is adding a new category -- TV documentary producer.

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Famie has produced the TV show *Our Italian Story*, which was broadcast on WXYZ-TV (Channel 7) recently and is working on his second program, *Our Polish Story*.

As you may have noticed, my name ends in "ski," which is why I had dinner Tuesday evening with Famie at Peabody's in Birmingham. Famie is looking for contacts in the Polish community to flesh out his documentary, as well as get my perspective of the community.

Famie is wise enough to know that trying to tell the story of a whole ethnic group is not an easy task, especially the Polish community. We've been dragged through the mud so often that we're pretty gunshy of the media -- and I say that as a member of the media.

I mentioned to him the role-playing game I have that was sold in the 1970s. It features an obviously Polish character who was the only one in his circle of friends whose IQ was above his bowling average. Remember the Polish mugs you could buy? With the handle on the inside?

That kind of stuff has left the Polish community so sensitive that even a fairly innocuous outing like the movie *Polish Wedding* was rejected by many Poles who saw it as reinforcing stereotypes. And does

anyone remember the infamous *Hamtramck* TV show from the late 1980s that raised a furor?

I pointed out to Famie that Poles have made substantial contributions to American society in many areas. Back in the 1940s, Vincent Markowski adopted the screen name Tom Tyler and became the No. 1 Western star in the movies. On the other end of the spectrum, Emil Konopinski held the patent for the atomic bomb with Edward Teller.

Metro Detroit has one of the largest concentrations of Poles in the nation, and there are many Polish social organizations, churches, singing and dancing troupes, restaurants, shops and the like stretching from Downriver to Mt. Clemens.

Famie will have a more difficult time deciding what to leave out of the documentary than what to include in it.

Famie provided me with a DVD of the program he did on the Italian community. It's a sharp production that gave me confidence that Famie will do a proper job with the Poles.

He is respectful of the culture and manages to cover key aspects of the culture, including history, cuisine, business and even trivia.

Of course, such projects aren't cheap to produce, and Famie is financing his production by raising sponsorships. That can be a tough sell these days, when almost all areas of the local economy are hurting. But I hope he does well with this project. This will be a treasure when it's done and a symbol of pride for all Poles.

Famie has been putting an extraordinary effort in to the project, videotaping events including choral performances at St. Albertus Church, perhaps the most historic Polish Catholic Church in the state.

Famie's series will focus on other ethnic groups as well, including Arabs, Albanians, Greeks and Germans, among others. Given the rich diversity of metro Detroit, he has plenty of subjects to focus on.

You can get a taste of what he is doing on his Web site OurStoryOf.com.

You might even want to become a sponsor.