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Keith Famie's next act

Local Italian-Americans subject of film

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CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

Celebrity chef-turned-television producer Keith Famie is putting the finishing touches on a documentary about metro Detroit's Italian community that is scheduled to air commercial-free Dec. 9 on WXYZ-TV Channel 7.



All together, Famie, a former cast member of CBS' "Survivor" said the documentary will be drawn from more than 50 interviews and more than 70 hours of video footage.

The project, called "Our Italian Story," is the first installment in a series of documentaries called "Our Story of," that Famie plans to complete. Plans include similar documentaries of metro Detroit's Polish and Armenian communities.

"It's really a series based around stories told and lives profiled of various cultures that came here for whatever reason from other countries," Famie said.

The documentary will feature the stories of prominent local Italians such as Jim Lipari, founder of **Lipari Foods Inc.**, and Tony Filippis, founder of Rochester Hills-based **Wright & Filippis Inc.**, as well as cultural events,

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PHOTO COURTESY OF KEITH FAMIE

Joe Selvaggio, founder of Pointe Dairy, is one of the Italian businesspeople interviewed for a documentary being produced by Keith Famie.

Famie: New adventure for chef

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such as footage from a traditional Italian wedding that took place in Plymouth Sept. 16.

Famie said he became inspired to do the project when his own father became ill and died 2½ years ago.

During the final months of his father's life, Famie said, he sat and listened as his father told him tales about his childhood that he didn't know about because he was too young to remember them.

"I've always felt that the elders have such amazing stories, but nobody really takes time to listen to them. And this is really about that," Famie said.

Lipari, for example, built Lipari Foods into a \$235 million-a-year food distribution company after starting off in the 1950s selling barbecue sauce called Bazzo's. Filippis, who lost his legs in a train accident at age 12, later founded his rehabilitative health care company.

"You are going to walk away from the show being inspired, and filled with wisdom," Famie said.

Famie said it will cost about \$230,000 to film, produce and pay for the airtime for the documentary, which will air three times on WXYZ in December.

The costs were almost entirely underwritten by sponsors from metro Detroit's Italian-American business community. Lipari Foods, a distributor of food to grocery

'OUR ITALIAN STORY'

What is it? "Our Italian Story" is a documentary about Detroit's Italian heritage and culture, with an emphasis on the first generation of Italians that came to America.

When does it air? Three times commercial-free on WXYZ-Channel 7: 7 p.m. Dec. 9, 1 p.m. Dec. 16, 9 a.m. Dec. 25.

stores and restaurants, is the presenting sponsor.

Famie said Lipari Foods' contribution made it possible for the program to air commercial-free, something that's important to Famie.

"I needed the extra 12 minutes of content, and I didn't want the story broken up," Famie said.

Thom Lipari, son of Warren-based Lipari Foods founder Jim Lipari, said the quality of some of the early interviews that Famie had completed helped to convince him to get involved.

"As I started working with him I learned that he was really doing something more sincere than just selling airtime — he was really telling a story that needed to be told," Lipari said.

Famie, who was a chef in the 1980s at **Chez Raphael** and who opened **Les Auteurs** in downtown Royal Oak in 1988, is also well known for his stint on CBS' "Survivor" in 2001.

Since then he has founded

a video production company called **Visionalist Entertainment Productions L.L.C.** in Novi. The company has produced food programs for **Food Network**, has had two cookbooks published and produced a documentary called "Ice Warriors," which followed former **Detroit Red Wings** players as they traveled across Russia.

In addition to the documentary, Famie and Toni



Wisne Sabina

Wisne Sabina are organizing a charity event on Dec. 3 at the Rock Financial Showplace that will debut the documentary.

The event, called "Flavors of Italy," will benefit **The Salvation Army; St. Louis Center**, a residential center for people with developmental disabilities; and **A.N.F.E. of Michigan**, an organization that helps to pay for corrective eye surgery for Italian children.

Tickets are \$200 and can be purchased at **Nino Salvaggio International Marketplace, Andiamo Italia** in Warren, **Italia American Club of Livonia**, and by calling Visionalist Entertainment Productions at (248) 624-9636.

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