

PORTLAND

ITALIAN COMMUNITY



Renato Solpietro teaches how to cook Italian recipes with enthusiasm and humor

Sharing a Passion for Italian Culture, Travel and Cuisine

KERRY-LYNNE DEMARINIS BROWN

Meeting Chef Renato Solpietro for the first time is a happy experience. He is passionate about life in general and Italian culture and cooking in particular. His wife, Adrienne Davis is just as outgoing - picture a glass jar full of swirling fireflies and you have a good image of the exuberance and joy that emanate from them both. They pour that energy into their two businesses, *A&R Tours* and *Napoli, That's Amore!*

Born and raised in Naples, Renato comes from a long line of talented chefs. His mother, Anita, is no exception. Growing up, he was fascinated watching her preparations in the kitchen.

"My mamma makes the Neapolitan lasagna," he shares. "She says that her recipe was given to her by her bisnonna. And the bisnonna of her bisnonna had this recipe. This recipe goes all the way back to my ancestor who made it for the last King of Naples, Francesco II."

Anita was a strong influence on her sons. She pushed them to learn English, to study hard in school, and to appreciate their Italian culture. Renato

studied Italian history, literature and mythology. His gregarious personality led him into work as a resort director and entertainer. In fact, he was in between acting jobs when he and Adrienne met at a children's theater class in Rome.

"He asked me out for six months," laughs Adrienne. "He would bring me mozzarella di buffala from Naples and sfogliatella; he went broke! When we finally went out on a date, we were never apart again." They were married in Naples.

Raised in Portland, Adrienne grew up listening to her grandfather tell tales of his time in Italy during WWII. His love for travel and all things Italian inspired Adrienne to include the country on a backpacking trip through Europe with her sister. "It is so different when you go to Italy the first time; you just feel something so intense. You feel the history in the streets and the ancientness around you."

Determined to live in Italy, Adrienne first worked as an au pair in Rome and then as a tour guide with a large tour company in Rome, until Renato convinced her to quit her job so they could start their own company. They began as a cultural association in 2009, leading

small groups with an emphasis on Italian history and culture. With Renato's deep knowledge of Italian history and mythology, his natural storytelling ability, and Adrienne's art history background, *A&R Tours* began to grow in popularity. Even so, there was still a learning curve.

"We went flat broke the first year," says Adrienne. "And then it went crazy!"

Of course, a big aspect of the tours revolves around Italian food. After that first year, Renato began offering traditional Neapolitan dishes in a special lunch for their guests at his parent's home, overlooking the Bay of Naples. The experience was unforgettable.

"It turned out to be the number one thing they talked about on Trip Advisor," the couple laughs together. "They would say, 'Visit the Colosseum, visit the Vatican, go to Pompei, but don't miss the Neapolitan lunch!'"

Today, *A&R Tours* includes several employees in Italy, and they still specialize in connecting the traveler to the local history, culture and cuisine. Adrienne and Renato live half of the year in Rome, the other half in Portland. Three years ago, they welcomed daughter Emily, and they are expecting their second child in mid-July.

The success of the cooking classes in Italy inspired Renato

to begin cooking classes in Portland. Operating as *Napoli, That's Amore!*, his goal is to present authentic Italian food in an entertaining but educational atmosphere. In addition to catering, the couple offers in-home and group classes, as well as dinner parties where each guest becomes a part of meal preparation. Italian-style weddings are becoming a specialty.

"Italian cooking should be authentic," says Renato. "It is important to use very good ingredients. My cuisine is simple, organic - nothing artificial. When we come from Italy, I bring a lot of pasta, mostly artisanal pasta, handmade and amazing."

Renato brought his cooking enthusiasm to Festa Italiana for the first time last year. It was a family affair with Adrienne and other family members prepping and cooking. Their *Frittura Napolitana* - lightly breaded and fried seasonal vegetables - quickly became the favorite dish of the Festa. This year, he will prepare fried calamari.

Thinking back to the lessons he learned as a child, Renato knows what legacy he wants to leave to his children.

"It is important to be active and work but not work to make only money," he says. "Work to keep your soul and brain active. Always recycle yourself. Life is an adventure - you can't wait for this thing to happen or that thing to happen; be ready to change and risk."

The Italian Business Club presents an Italian Marketplace in Wine Country

TONYA RUSSO HAMILTON

In the heart of the Willamette Valley's wine country, Old Town Sherwood is set to celebrate Italian culture at an Italian Marketplace featuring local Italian businesses, musicians, and vendors on Saturday, July 25 from 3:00-9:00pm.

Along with their generous sponsors, the Italian Business Club Foundation is excited to host this cultural event. The IBC is a local Italian organization that supports Italian culture in Portland and awards a scholarship to a student each year at Portland State University.

Sherwood has a rich Italian history in the area, really prospering around the turn of the 20th century when the Italian farmers who had settled there made onions the area's biggest export crop. A lasting record of this is Cipotle Road, named for the onion (cipolla) flats that once lined the local highway.

The Marketplace will open in Cannery Square, a beautiful brick "piazza" with cascading fountain, and will feature Italian food and wine, gelato and cof-

fee from local merchants. There will be homemade pizzelle, hearth-style breads, pasta and olive oil, as well as information on private tours of Italy and cooking classes by both Taste of Italy and Napoli, That's Amore!

Crooner Kes Rooney will serenade the crowds with the songs of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin. Vocalist Pina di Rosa will perform classic

Nick Nigro and Bay Ewald will be signing copies of their newly released cookbook, *Living the Mediterranean Diet*.

To keep everyone cool in the summer sun, Voices for the Performing Arts will be selling Italian sodas, and balloon twisting, face painting and a visiting donkey will keep the children busy when they aren't playing in the fountain

There will be something for



Vocalist Pina di Rosa brings classic Neapolitan songs to the event

Neapolitan songs.

Children will play Italian language games presented by La Scuola Italiana, and authors

everyone at the Italian Marketplace in Wine Country. For more information, visit www.italianportland.com