

WEST OAKLAND

**YOUR WEEKLY
COMMUNITY
Free Press**



WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press

Keith Famie, 47, left, of Novi works with senior editor Brian Shaffer, 48, of Canton while editing footage at Kinetic Post Productions in Southfield. Famie's first foray into TV was being on the CBS-TV show "Survivor." Now the famous chef has also created TV shows with his own production company, including his Emmy-winning program, "Our Italian Story."

TV chef relishes new calling

Novi's Keith Famie chronicles diversity in documentaries

By ALEX P. KELLOGG
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

It's not easy to see how dicing onions and marinating chicken breasts can be like splicing together reams of raw TV footage or spending countless hours adding a single track

of audio. But acclaimed chef and TV director Keith Famie swears it's all the same thing.

Known first for being a cook, Famie now has a much bigger taste for his other, more recently cultivated passions.

He brought acclaim to a number of metro Detroit res-

taurants, got local TV appearances from it and later landed on the second season of CBS's "Survivor," all of which made him more interested in filmmaking. His stint on "Survivor" helped him land TV shows with the Food Network.

Now, local broadcasters

have sent him traveling around the world — in search of ethnic roots instead of food.

The Novi resident, who also has an office there, has two episodes of a recurring occasional series, "Our Story Of," airing in December. "Our Greek Story" and "Our Arab American Story" are set to air on WXYZ Channel 7 on Dec. 8 and Dec. 15,

respectively. Both are one-hour documentaries. Famie's "Our Story" series first aired last year with shows about Italians and Polish immigrants in metro Detroit.

The shows often follow families as they trace their roots back to their homelands.

See NOVI, 6

WEST OAKLAND

**YOUR WEEKLY
COMMUNITY
Free Press**



WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press

Keith Famie looks over fliers for upcoming documentaries he has been editing of Detroit-area residents visiting families back in their homelands. Famie is doing "Our Greek Story" and "Our Arab American Story," scheduled to air on WXYZ-TV Channel 7 in December.

NOVI | Chef creates TV documentaries on diversity

From Page 1

"I really try to take the culture apart," says Famie, who is 47, a father of two teenagers and lives with his longtime girlfriend, Katrin Koivu, "so I really can tell a story."

His business partners buy TV slots whole so that no commercials need air. Everyone is still figuring out how to make money on it, Famie admits. But local events that promote the cultures he studies have helped a lot. For example, "Our Arab American Story" will air at Flavors of the Arab World on Dec. 2 at 5 p.m. at Rock Financial Showplace in Novi. Often, sponsors of the events are the same groups that sponsor his documentaries.

Famie won a number of local Emmys for "Our Italian Story," the first of his recent series — and perhaps the one closest to his heart. He is half-Italian and half-French.

But until recently, this was not the work for which Famie was known. His reputation was as a master chef.

"He's moved on because he's so creative," says Toni Sabina, a longtime friend from a family of restaurateurs. She's also one of the executive producers of Famie's series.

"This is his calling," she says. "He reinvents himself all the time, with new projects, new things and it's very exciting because you never know what's going to happen next."

A so-so high school student whose first job was at a bad Chinese restaurant in his hometown of Detroit, Famie used his love of cooking to travel as a youth. For example, he worked as a "schlep," he says, who "peeled carrots" in the south of France for a few months at 19, learning little more than lessons about life. One of his first good jobs was as a cook at a hotel owned by Sabina's family.

He became a top chef shortly after he opened Auteurs in Royal Oak in the late '80s, gaining national accolades from Food & Wine and Esquire magazines. He moved on to help open Forté in Birmingham, another premier eatery.

His biggest mistake: converting his first restaurant, Les Auteurs, to a cowboy-themed restaurant to spice things up.

His other big mistake — or not: On "Survivor: The Australian Outback," Famie was rumored to have burned some rice, a faux pas extraordinaire for a master chef. The allegation still bothers him.

"First of all, I didn't burn the

rice. I don't even use the four-letter word rice; I can't use it anymore," jokes Famie, who made it to the final three on the reality show. "But it was a cool experience, don't get me wrong."

The appearance propelled his career, helping him land a show with the Food Network that ran for 32 episodes and in reruns until 2004. He used to do as many as 10 guest cooking appearances a year for local nonprofits, but no longer.

Now he considers himself strictly a filmmaker and producer — not a cook.

"I think I've found a new medium of expression for myself and I really enjoy it," he says.

Those who work with him say he's a soothing interviewer who effortlessly prompts people to open up.

His series follows local folks — businessmen, blue-collar workers, homemakers and all those in between — as they tell how they came to America, and the trials and triumphs of that process. He weaves in footage of crinkled black-and-white family photos, interviews by cozy fireplaces and even trips home to childhood haunts.

In his show on Greek immigrants, one woman tells the story of how she lost half her jaw

avoiding Nazi bombers by hiding in a cave near her hometown in Greece. She talks about nearly dying during one plastic surgery meant to correct the damage, and how her husband told her enough was enough, he loved her as is.

"It's never boring," says Famie's son, Josh, 15, who often, along with his older sister, Alicia, 17, travels with his dad while he's working. "It's never like a day that you're going to be in a hotel all day. It's like you're really out there. If you're in Greece, you're going to see the sights, you're going to meet new people."

Both Famie's son and daughter attend Harrison High School in Farmington Hills. He's a sophomore and she's a senior.

Famie says both are good cooks, but like him, they also love to sit and help shoot, sift through and edit footage.

"I love cooking, I really do," Famie says while peering over the shoulder of an editor in a Southfield editing suite. "But I think this is my medium."

For more information about the series, go to www.ourstoryof.com.

Contact ALEX P. KELLOGG at 248-351-3693 or akellogg@freepress.com.