



Celebrity Chef Anthony Bourdain Visits Upper St. Clair

On December 4, 2007, internationally recognized chef and author Anthony Bourdain joined a sold-out crowd at the Upper St. Clair High School Theatre for a candid discussion and delighted the audience with culinary tales from around the world. Thanks to the kindness of the organizers, I was fortunate enough to be there and enjoyed chatting briefly with Anthony after the presentation. He is as outspoken, witty, and funny in person as he is on television.

Anthony authored a series of best-selling books, most notably *Kitchen Confidential*, and is currently seen hosting the Travel Channel's celebrated show, *Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations*. He proclaimed, "I have the best job in the world. The network subsidizes my travel, my eating, and my drinking—and I don't even have to shave! It goes beyond my wildest dreams." He's also proud that his show is the only one on the Travel Channel that has a parental advisory.

Mr. Bourdain's career began with a dishwasher position in an era when being a chef was thought to be a "last-resort type job, back in the day when cooking was what you did between your arrest and conviction." He climbed the ranks of the kitchen hierarchy in typical "old-school fashion" and was formally educated at the Culinary Institute of America. He is currently the executive chef at *Brasserie Les Halles* in Manhattan and has exciting culinary adventures planned for Laos, Portugal, Colombia, Spain, Egypt, and Tokyo.

When asked about other celebrity chefs of our era, he hinted that both Emeril Lagasse and Rachel Ray are "somewhat annoying, almost condescending, and Rachel Ray's voice just grates on you." He continued, "Sandra Lee's idea of good food is a chopped-up Cinnabon served in a martini glass with Cool Whip—What is that?" On a lighter note, Bourdain gave lofty accolades to star chef Mario Batali, who took his celebrity status to the streets of New York City with *Babbo* restaurant and successfully used his Food Network status to win over initially hesitant patrons. Anthony proclaimed Seattle's *Salume* (owned and operated by Batali's father, Armando) "one of the true happy places in the world for me ... old school and amazing ... Police tape it and declare it a national monument."

Bourdain was welcomed to our area by Upper St. Clair's Town Hall South, a philanthropic organization that brought other notables to the local stage this year, such as journalists Lisa Ling and Robin Wright. A post-lecture luncheon was held at St. Clair Country Club. Next year's four-lecture series will include a fresh round of dynamic speakers, at a refreshingly modest price, with the optional keynote luncheons to follow.

When a member of the audience asked his advice for an aspiring youth pondering a career as a chef, Bourdain recommended he volunteer in a busy restaurant, withstand the ensuing heat, pressure, and vulgarity for at least two weeks, and then decide if this may be a career for which he still feels passion. When asked about his ethnic

background, Bourdain responded, "I'm bitter that I am of French descent and not Italian-American." His wife, a native of Northern Italy, is a "merciless critic of my Italian cooking at home—so I avoid it out of fear of embarrassment, but I am proud of my osso bucco, nonetheless."

In the last issue, I wrote about travel dining tips and promised to share some personal favorites from my recent travels. Since I've been traveling a good bit lately, I have decided to focus on one destination per issue. We visit Hawaii annually for family vacation and here are some highlights on Maui. Enjoy a fantastic lunch at Aloha Mixed Plate just outside Lahaina. Plenty locals eat here and the atmosphere is very informal; a deck overlooks the ocean. Lunch averages \$12.95 for classic Hawaiian mixed plates, which always consist of an entrée meat, lomi lomi (diced, marinated fresh salmon or tuna), poi (taro root derivative – a purple glue-like substance that's hard to love), macaroni salad and two (always two) scoops of sticky rice. Hit Sansei in Napili, located near the Ritz Carlton. This place rocks! Get there early since lines form around 5:00 p.m. for the first seating. A cool Central Maui spot is Hali'i Maile General Store. I loved the braised short ribs with root vegetables and truffle white cheddar macaroni & cheese, but would order more local flavors next time. A key dining tip for Maui (and all the Hawaiian islands for that matter) is to take advantage of the incredibly fresh lettuces, fish, fruit and local beef. Also in Central Maui, The Surfing Goat Dairy produces local goat cheeses in a variety of interesting flavors, not to mention tours of the facility allow children to feed the happy goats. In the next issue, I will feature a different island of Hawaii ... Oahu and the North Shore. □

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