



## Cater King

Bella Sera by Greco's Chef Jason Capps is building a catering empire in Pittsburgh, with a mind on the bride.

BY VICTORIA BRADLEY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEGAN WYLIE

**T**he warm leather sofas at Bella Sera by Greco's feel like the crackly skin of a baked potato and are usually reserved for brides, a comfy space where she can gush with giddy bridesmaids away from her bustling banquet hall. I plunk down on one with Chef Jason Capps and peer into the adjacent room, dressed in ivory linens and fine china set for a beautiful nighttime affair. I can now comprehend the obvious, why he chose the name Bella Sera ... since "beautiful evening" translates and transcends what appears to happen here.



Capps has been catering since he was in high school. A few years of college and some culinary apprenticeships later, he moved to Charleston, S.C., and cooked at SNOB, Slightly North of Broad (Street). He migrated to New York City in the mid '90s and got back into catering at the prestigious Dean & DeLuca. "Those were the days, man," Capps says with a sigh.

As it turns out, cooking is in the Capps family DNA. The chef's grandparents sold steak sandwiches and birch beer back in the '40s at the Cowtown Rodeo and local South Jersey fairgrounds. They went on to build The Hickory Steak House, which

**Sesame-crusted ahi tuna**



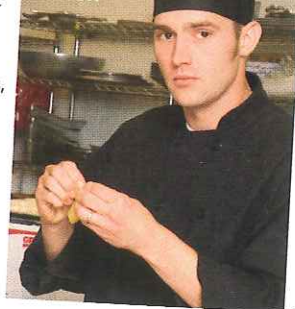
## Chef's Dish

**GREEN, FOR GOOD:** Bella Sera by Greco's and Greco's Gourmet Catering will receive its green certification next month — the first caterer in the region to hold this distinction.

**TOP CHEF:** Capps is on the culinary council for the International Caterers Association and was a recipient of the 2008 ICA Star Award. Last year, Greco's was chosen to cook for 150 other caterers. "We were under a fairly large microscope of critics that night," Capps says, "but we blew them away."

**RESTAURANTS, HERE:** "People aren't afraid to try things they've never heard of before. We want to keep pushing that envelope," Hebson says.

**Sous Chef Andrew Hebson**



they successfully ran for 50 years. Capps' Uncle Ross found catering to be more lucrative than the restaurant. "When you're catering monster events at Atlantic City casinos for 10,000 people, there's a lot of money to be made. We cooked three tons of ribs in one day," Capps says.

Eager to start his own catering company in Pittsburgh, Capps returned home in 1999 and acquired a loan to open Greco's Gourmet To-Go, branded with his mother's family name. "My mom has always been my biggest fan. Growing up in an Italian home, food has been a powerful medium for us." Collectively, Greco's Gourmet Catering and Bella Sera by Greco's caters roughly 65 weddings a year, "each one as unique as the brides we serve," Capps says. His business has outgrown two spaces already; the current facility is a

banquet venue that is nearly 20,000 square feet. The party can now come to him.

"We love brides," Capps says. "We have a knack for getting in their heads and making them happy."

Capps appears passionate about signature drinks, particularly what he calls "intro drinks" — those served upon the guests' arrival. Last year, he catered a wedding for a couple who had met at a motocross race and served pony bottles of Miller Lite, "with straws for the ladies, of course," he laughs. And Capps' sous chef, Andrew Hebson, created a drink with ginger liquor and Blue Moon. "We have a lab," Hebson says and adds that wedding guests also like to pluck appetizers off moving trays.

I'm a sucker for a taco and appreciate Hebson's version — stuffed with another of my great food loves: smoked duck. The pita is accented with a super light cinnamon crème fraiche. The orange relish salsa makes it especially drippy. Aged Manchego trips the taste with a little tang.

Crostini are that special event food that dare me to take them in one bite, the shot-equivalent of the appetizer world. I never learn though, and attempt to gingerly munch Capps' beef tenderloin in half. It's much too chewy for my dainty nibble, and I end up glossing my lips with smears of whole grain mustard aioli. Plus, try to bite a grape tomato, delicately balancing, in half. It's not an easy feat.

Take it from this stubborn eater, the dish is much neater all at once. You won't miss a thing; in fact, the sweet onion marmalade will be even more apparent.

Sesame-crusted ahi is a peppery and daubed with wasabi mayonnaise. Not for the mild palate, this bite packs enough punch to make me blush. (I love it.) The spicy tuna sets itself apart from appetizer regularity served aboard a bed of kimchee, of Korean origin, a well-seasoned cabbage treat.

Bocconcini skewers are interesting. I've always loved the soft white spongy cheese, but these tiny spears are also looped with white anchovies, a fish I feel just fine about when it's chopped up in sauce, but in its sliver-y state, it reminds me too much of the "surprises" my Italian grandmother used to fry in the donuts she made Christmas Eve morning. The snack is redeemed with yellow teardrop tomatoes, roasted red pepper, and a whole basil leaf.

This caterer has arrived. Here comes the bride. Is it time to eat? ☺

**Bella Sera by Greco's**, 414 Morganza Road, Canonsburg. 724.745.5575.  
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## EVENTS | January

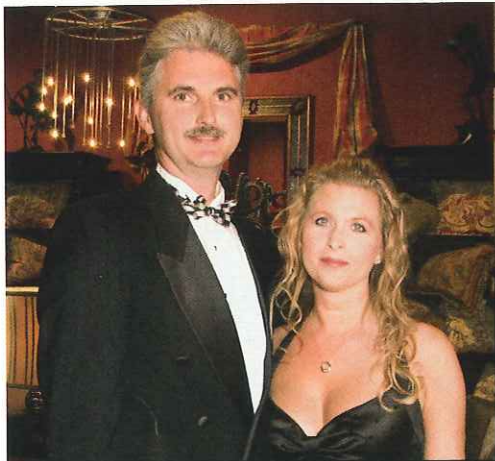
### ARPCA Porsche Prom

The Allegheny Region Porsche Club of America drove into Artifacts this year to hold its annual Porsche Prom as a way to thank its members for their participation over the course of 2008. The 78 members in attendance cruised from room to room to view the fabulous oriental rugs and unique antique furniture on display as they savored gourmet hors d'oeuvres, wine, and martinis. "It was just very conducive for people to see old friends and meet new friends," says Ken Jeremiah, ARPCA. "It was initially just set up as a holiday party for our members, but then more and more people got involved so we made it a formal affair — a formal affair, where you could have fun."

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Phil & Sandra Hundley,  
George Patterson, Michael Terral



Rob & Beverly Pecori



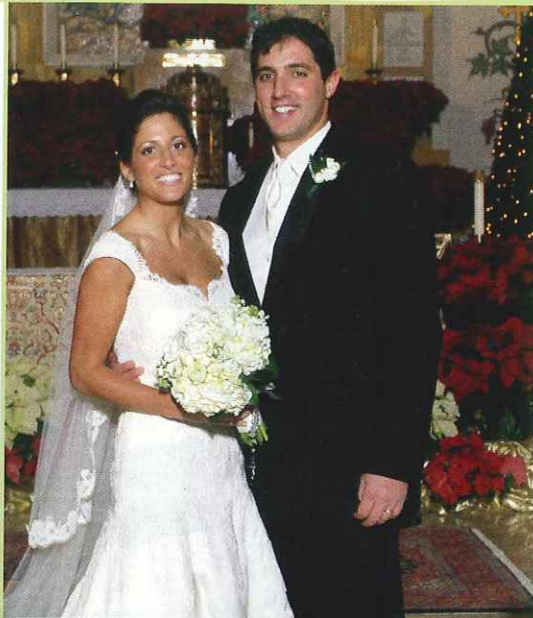
Scott Mores, Aprile Smith



Jason Capps, Terri Mattock, Randy Evans

**ANGELA  
ZAGARI AND  
MICHAEL**

**PLATT** — Their Italian-themed reception at Bella Sera by Greco's in Canonsburg treated guests to penne with vodka sauce, mini cannolis and gelato, and focaccia pizzas for late-night snacking, cooked up by Greco's Gourmet Catering.



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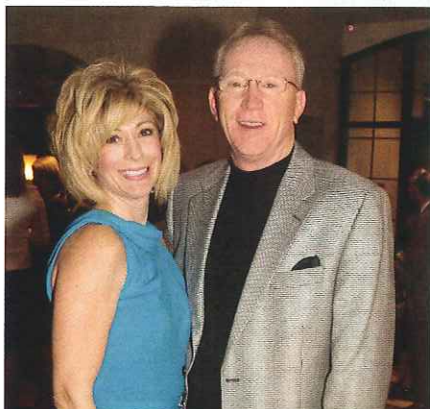
**Greco's**  
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## Under the Tuscan Moon

It was a beautiful night "Under the Tuscan Moon" at Bella Sera by Greco's, where **Audia Caring Heritage Association** hosted its 2008 Charity Gala. The event kicked off with a VIP Champagne Reception, and segued into a dinner of authentic Mediterranean fare, dancing to Dr. Zoot & Orchestra, and a silent auction that helped to raise \$45,000 for ACHA. But the highlight of the evening came when MARC USA Advertising Division president and CEO Michele Fabrizi and event co-chair Dr. Rosemarie Cibik received the organization's Lifetime Achievement awards. 

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Chris Motini, Sharon Aulicino



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