



Andy LoRusso gets the audience whipping their napkins around. LoRusso, the "Singing Chef," brought his song and dinner show to the Marriott Wednesday evening, in a fundraiser for the Marco Island Center for the Arts. **Lance Shearer/Eagle Correspondent (3)**

Mangia! Mangia!

DINNER SOUNDS GOOD— 'SINGING CHEF' BRINGS ART OF COOKING, MUSIC TO MARRIOTT

By **LANCE SHEARER**
Eagle Correspondent

Of all the art forms, none is closer to the hearts of men than the art of cooking. After all, it has a home just underneath the heart, in the stomach.

Wednesday evening at the Marco Marriott, the art of cooking shared the bill with the art of music. In a fundraiser for the Marco Island Center for the Arts, Andy LoRusso, the "Singing Chef," brought his show to the island, taking a crowd of over 200 for a culinary and musical tour of Italy.

In a performance that came from somewhere between La Scala and the Borscht Belt, LoRusso whipped up an Italian dinner onstage, interspersing his cooking chores with the classic standards of the Italian-American songbook.

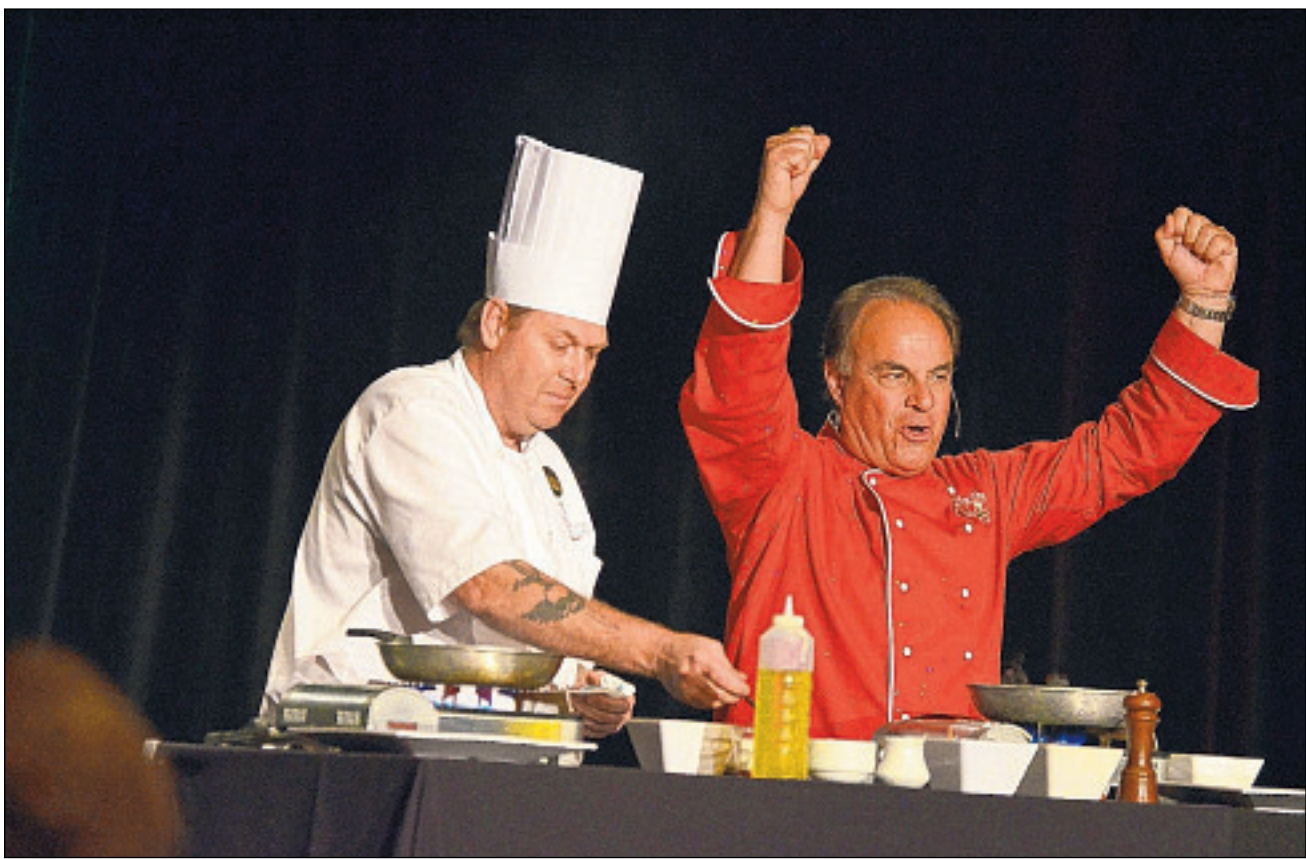
Born in New Jersey to Sicilian parents, LoRusso drew on both traditions, working the crowd and cracking jokes in between the songs and culinary tips.

"The only way this doesn't work is if you don't pay the electric bill," he said. "No one has gas on Marco Island — unless you're eating too much pasta. He got the crowd whipping their napkins around for one number, and invited everyone to sing along, with the words filling in on the video screens, karaoke-style.

LoRusso sang "Arrivederci, Roma" and then "Sorrento," while spotlighting a couple of couples who were celebrating high-numbered wedding anniversaries. Betty and Ted Ely were feted for their 57th, and LoRusso urged the crowd, "okay, at an Italian wedding, what do we do when we want them to kiss?" Throughout the ballroom, silverware clinked into glasses.

With a roomful of guests to entertain, LoRusso got some assistance on the cooking front. Marriott Chef Jason Smith, his white coat and toque contrasting with LoRusso's red satin outfit, joined forces on stage as the two men collaborated on a demonstration of the evening's meal.

The actual dinners eaten by the guests came from the Marriott's kitchen, keeping pace with the demonstration dishes prepared on the stage, where television cameras



Andy LoRusso works with Marriott chef Jason Smith.



Bill and Karen Young get up on stage to make a singing dessert.

caught every stir and gout of flame, just like television cooking shows.

Dinner started with sweet fennel and orange salad, with arugula and toasted walnuts, with a sweet and sour honey/sherry vinaigrette that Art Center executive director Lynn Holley pronounced "the best salad dressing I've ever had." Like many of LoRusso's recipes, the salad and dressing can be found on his website, www.singingchef.com.

The main course was chicken scallopini, or chick-

en piccata, depending on how you want to look at it. "It's scallopini, because it's pounded," said LoRusso, "but the sauce, that's piccata." The entrée was accompanied by tender vegetables and garlic mashed potatoes, although that last did elicit some comment at one table.

"Mashed potatoes on Italian night?" questioned Anita Peppucci, Italian herself. She reminisced about her mother's homemade tortellini, although, she said, she hasn't cooked them herself in years. LoRusso said potatoes are easier than pasta, when you're cooking for 200, and want to get everything just right.

For the finale, LoRusso brought two couples up on stage, to cook dessert while he sang the recipe. To the tune of "Funiculi, Funicula," he led them through creating Italian style cheesecake on polenta, keeping the amateurs moving at a brisk pace and delighting the audience.

LoRusso has taken his act from Istanbul to the Calgary Stampede, with many casinos and ballrooms in between. He has authored cookbooks, and has a new CD out.

Art Center executive director Holley promised more such affairs.

"We are on the move," she said. "The Center for the Arts cannot sustain itself if we just focus on the art of painting. It is important as we "move on" and increase our activities in other areas, partner up with other organizations and broaden our reach, that we bring the community together to really enjoy themselves, to laugh together, break bread together and have fun while we celebrate the arts. Our goal is to make Marco Island a cultural destination point, and the Center to be its center."

The Island's Finest Quality & Selection
Fresh Pink Shrimp • Gourmet Groceries • Dips & Spreads • Prepared Foods
Stone Crab Claws Available • Daily Specials • Custom Party Platters • Exceptional Wines
Sample Delicious Fare Prepared in our Kitchen

Come visit Chef Scott Young
721 Bald Eagle Dr. • Marco Island
(same plaza as Porky's) **239.394.3686**

**Over 50 Fresh
Seafood Choices Daily!**


PARADISE SEAFOOD
& Gourmet Market
www.ParadiseSeafoodMarco.com