



DANIEL P. BADER\Observer-Dispatch Singing Chef Andy LoRusso makes a salad with Mario Cappelli, executive chef of Daniele's at Valley View at the Stanley Theater. LoRusso was the dessert to Sunday's Taste of Italy.

Taste of Italy a hit with vendors, patrons alike

By DANIEL P. BADER

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UTICA — Rosemary Spetka is Salvadorian, but on Sunday, as far as her taste buds were concerned, she was Italian.

Spetka rested behind a table on the second floor of the Stanley Center for the Art's lobby, taking a break from the first ever Taste of Italy event. On the table was a box of cupcakes from Sugar Babes Cupcakes.

“We figure we’ll take them home and cut them into fours so we can all try some,” Spetka said.

In her hand she held a menu from one of the almost two dozen vendors who set up tables around the lobby. She and her brother-in-law, David Spetka, who drove in from Syracuse, enjoyed sampling local eateries while waiting for the main course of the evening, a performance by “The Singing Chef” Andy LoRusso.

“I see a lot of places where I would like to eat,” Rosemary Spetka said. “It’s a good way for the restaurants to advertise.”

That’s exactly what was on the mind of the Sugar Babes, Terri Puleo-Donato and Kelli Grimaldi-Vance when they heard about the event.

The two Italian women are celebrating Sugar Babes’ first year in business, and looking for a storefront from which to start selling their sweets.

“We use this to get our name out and for networking,” Puleo-Donato said. “One of our best-selling is our chocolate cupcake and our chocolate cannoli cupcake.”

Kevin Marken, director of institutional advancement for the theater, said the event was thought of with sponsor New York Sash, after booking LoRusso for Sunday’s show.

“It started with the Singing Chef, and turned into a nice event with vendors,” Marken said.

LoRusso was booked for the weekend two or three years ago, he’s in high demand for the popular Italian-American Columbus Day weekend.

“We thought it was a good time when people are thinking about their Italian heritage,” Marken said. “On Columbus Day, everybody’s Italian.”

LoRusso, clad in his signature red jacket, took a tour of the Taste of Italy, stopping at Sammy and Annie Foods, and chatting with owner Christopher Giruzzi.

LoRusso, author of the cookbook “Sing and Cook Italian,” said he travels all over the United States and Europe cooking and singing as a fundraiser for the arts. Later in the evening, LoRusso would team up with Executive Chef Mario Cappelli from Daniele’s at Valley View to serve a meal to a number of ticket holders, sing a few songs and teach the entire audience how to cook a few dishes.

“I go wherever and anywhere people want great food and a good song,” LoRusso said.

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