



# Catering to Your Needs

*Jeramie and Debra Campana at their new location in Lake Barrington on Pepper Road.*

FIRST MET DEBRA AND JERAMIE CAMPANA when we were invited to talk about our kitchen wish lists, if we could have them, at Barrington's White House. There, we quickly got into specifics. Jeramie flashed his 10,000-watt smile as he described the hood he ordered for his new cooktop at their soon-to-be Lake Barrington location. Debra talked about the need for additional carts to handle the dishes and platters they use for the parties they cater for up to 2,000 guests, typically multiple parties in a single evening. What? I snapped to attention. How many? I needed to know more about this amazing catering couple.

Jeramie is a second-generation Barringtonian. He lived in Lake Barrington at LBS. Upon graduating from high school, he joined the United States Coast Guard. He was sent



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## ASPARAGUS CIGARS

YIELDS 16 BITE SIZED PIECES.

12 stalks of chilled, medium poached asparagus

½ cup chopped sugared pecan halves

½ cup crumbled blue cheese

8 Sheets phyllo dough

1 cup melted butter



Pre-heat oven to 375 degrees.

### POACHING ASPARAGUS:

While bringing a small pot of water to a boil on the stove, prepare a bowl of ice water that the asparagus stalks will fit into. Drop the asparagus stalks into the boiling water and cook for 2-3min. Quickly remove the stalks and immediately put them into the ice water to stop the cooking process. Remove from water once cooled and pat dry. Place in refrigerator until ready to use.

### SUGARING PECANS:

In a small sauce pan add one cup sugar and ¼ cup water, stir to incorporate. Bring to a slow boil and allow the mixture to begin to thicken. Add pecan halves and mix until they are fully coated with the sugar mixture. Once coated remove from stove and transfer pecans to parchment paper and allow them to cool, preferably for 24 hrs.

### ROLLING THE CIGAR:

On a clean, dry surface, lay out one sheet of phyllo dough and brush with melted butter from edge to edge. Individually add 3 more sheets of phyllo dough to the first one and brush each with butter. Towards the bottom of the sheets lay the stalks of asparagus, three on each side meeting in the middle, end to end, with the tips pointing in opposite directions. Sprinkle half of the crumbled blue cheese across the top of the asparagus from end to end. Repeat that process with half of the chopped sugared pecans.

Now we roll! Lift the phyllo sheets gently from the bottom and over the top of the asparagus. Pulling towards you gently continue to roll the dough forward wrapping the asparagus, cheese and pecans tightly. Repeat process with remaining ingredients to make another cigar. Brush entire cigar with melted butter to prevent drying out. You can either cut the cigar into 8 individual pieces (space them out) or place entire cigar on a cookie sheet. Either way, bake for 12-14min or until golden and flakey. Let cool, serve and enjoy!



to an air station in Traverse City, Mich., where he was assigned the job of cooking for the officers and crew. Had he cooked before? No, not really. When his parents went out when he was a child, he made some concoctions out of cans of spaghetti. That was about it.

Much to his surprise, and I'm sure, his parents', Jeramie found that he had an affinity for this work. He experimented with different spices, making military food actually enjoyable. If Michelin stars were given to mess tents, Jeramie would have earned one.

Returning to Barrington in 2003, he became sous chef for a former prominent Barrington caterer. After working the lunch shift in the kitchen, Jeramie ran the kitchens at catered events in the evening. His ideas and taste buds were challenged and refined. He was convinced of one thing: there was no substitute for fresh, well-prepared food.

After graduating with a degree in Art Commerce from Princeton University, Debra worked with architect Michael Graves. With her eye for art and her attention to detail, she was handling all the scheduling and arrangements for Mr. Graves' events. Moving on to a job with Hyatt International in their Latin American division, Debra was initiated into large event planning. In her capacity as special events planner for the trade association's National Fluid Powers Association, Debra took executives all over the world. She organized entire events both nationally and internationally.

In 2008, Debra became the assistant executive director of the Dole Mansion in Crystal Lake, Ill. She was put in charge of all events and creating a culinary program for them. Jeramie, at that time, was catering out of his house, and the Dole Mansion was one of his accounts. Spoiler alert! They met. They worked together. They married.

## COOKING AS TWO

In 2008, they opened Campana's Café, a restaurant and catering venue in Crystal Lake, Ill. The catering division sparked their imaginations, as they were able to meet face to face with their clients and customize menus for each affair. Realizing the restaurant business and corporate life was not for him, Jeramie pulled up stakes and came back to Barrington. Lucky for us!

In November 2010, Wild Asparagus was established as a legitimate business in Barrington. With virtually no advance advertising, the doors opened on Applebee St. Purely through word of mouth and glowing endorsements, their phone lines started buzzing and the calendar squares filled. From the very beginning, they decided



that everything would be made inhouse; nothing would be packaged. If an item didn't meet his high standards of taste, freshness, and appearance, Jeramie wouldn't make it.

No less important, Debra used her experience and artistic talents to great advantage in "the front of the house." It is she who researches venues and trends all over the country, or for that matter, the world, to bring the freshest ideas to her clients who wish to entertain. She has built a remarkable rapport with her staff and servers, and has personally trained each and every one in the "art" of fine dining. She and her two assistants make sure every contingency, every wish, and every expectation is fulfilled, often beyond the expectations of their client.

Debra handles every aspect ... other than the food. Jeramie handles that detail with incredible aplomb. His menu showcases the freshest fruits and vegetables. Whenever possible, he sources local vendors for his meat and poultry. The menu

changes seasonally, but a client's favorites will still be available when possible. His presentations are magnificent. After all, we eat with all our senses, and he and Debra make sure each one is stimulated.

It is no wonder Wild Asparagus is a preferred caterer at so many venues. Possessing both a village and state liquor license, they are able to do bar service and provide bartenders for all of their events. On the service side, Wild Asparagus has 50 employees that work just for them. There are currently four chefs and two intern chefs beside Jeramie who are allowed to cook. Jeramie is the final arbiter of what leaves the kitchen. It is not only the top-notch ingredients, but his distinct personality that's so evident in the menu.

Before I left their shop on Applebee, Jeramie asked if I'd like to see his work area. I must have startled him with the speed at which I jumped at this chance. He mans the cooking at one stove in a tiny room he shares with the staffer who does the dishes, pots, and pans. This puts new meaning to the idea of close encounters. What was most remarkable was the spotlessness of the work tables, storage areas, and refrigerator units. Jeramie's mantra is to leave any place he works better than he found it.

From the dinners and events they've put on for rock stars to private kitchens, each client gets the finest, most professional service. It is no wonder that Wild Asparagus has grown into larger quarters. In January, they'll move into their new digs on Pepper Road in the new Pepper Park in Lake Barrington. I can't wait to visit and see that hood! 🍷



*KATHY HARRISON is a Barrington Hills resident who teaches the fine art of cooking. For more information, call 847-381-4828.*