

Calombaris talks women and tennis

MASTERCHEF Australian judge George Calombaris is the celebrity chef *Gold Coasters love to hate* after his grilling of local etiquette queen Patsy Rowe. But the man sure can cook and he's headed our way to serve his talent at Moo Moo The Wine Bar and Grill on Friday and the Waterfront Food and Wine Festival on Saturday.

CoastConfidential reporter Renae Dyer speaks to the award-winning chef of Greek heritage who owns The Press Club in Melbourne.

Q: What food will you be serving on the Gold Coast?

A: There is definitely stuff off my new menus at the Press Club. I've been playing with new dishes. New ideas have been developed from inspirations from being in Greece.

Q: How has the success of MasterChef helped your career?

A: I don't really think it has helped the restaurants because we are still doing as well as we have normally done. There are definitely more customers coming in and looking for me. But generally we're getting the same amount of people. I was a cook, I became a chef, that's who I am but (MasterChef) has given me a media side I really enjoy. The show has helped the industry. I did a school visit and the amount of kids eating properly now and wanting to cook is phenomenal. I'm so pleased that is hap-

pened. We're changing a generation in many ways.

Q: What's your favourite dish to cook?

A: I don't have a favourite but at home I like to cook Asian-inspired food because I don't cook it in my restaurants.

Q: Female admirers inundated your restaurants with romantic requests. What do you make of the attention?

A: We (MasterChef judges) are not James Dean lookalikes (laughs). I heard that rumour. It's quite humbling. I think if you give people good love you'll get it in return.

Q: What have the MasterChef contestants been doing since the show?

A: They are all doing really well. Julie won but Poh has also had a few offers. There is all this contention over how the competition was rigged but the difference between the final 10 contestants was one eighth of a second.

Q: What's the recipe to your

success?

A: I've always loved food. I first did an apprenticeship at the Sofitel in Melbourne. It set me straight. Then I did a lot of travel and worked hard. That's the recipe to my success.

Q: What are your funniest memories starting out as a cook?

A: The only memories I only really have of my apprenticeship were head down, bum up. I come from a disciplined background in terms of cooking.

Q: What's the biggest blunder you've made in the kitchen?

A: I've made lots of mistakes and I still make mistakes. I remember burning something cooking. When I was an apprentice I thought I could cook anything. So I invited around my mates to my mum's for lunch which I prepared in my mum's brand new kitchen. I thought I could flamb prawns and I burnt my mum's Rangehood forgetting that I was cooking in a domestic kitchen.

Q: How do you keep the weight



off when you're eating and cooking for a living?

A: I love tennis. I got back last week and my coach said I looked like I've been in the pastures. He said 'I was watching you on the show and thought don't take that second

bite but you kept taking second bites'. But I'm back on the court now and I'm loving it.

Q: What's next on your agenda?

A: World domination (laughs).

Hellas restaurant employee offers service with a smile

George Poulos has been all over the world, but no matter where he lands, his heart will be with the hospitality industry. He has lived in Australia, Greece, Illinois and now Tarpon Springs. His first job was as a hardware store cashier; then he worked as a grocery store bagger. But ever since then his family has been in the restaurant business. Poulos moved to the Tampa Bay area about 10 years ago and has been a server for Hellas in Tarpon Springs.

What brought you to Hellas?

I first moved down here for my brother. He had to go back to school for real estate because the laws are different here from Chicago and he needed help. I came down with his wife, who introduced me to the Tarpon Springs area, and when I came to Hellas these folks opened their hearts up to me like family. I decided to give working here a try and helped out with management. After I started having my own family and couldn't be at work as much I went back into the serving position.

In addition to serving what are your



duties?

Helping out the other servers and helping out the managers. Making sure everybody is okay and tending to everyone's wants and needs. I help make sure that whether a guest comes back next week or in 20 years that the food and hospitality is always going to be the same. I have had customers come in that have never had Greek food before and I try to explain the menu. Some even tell me that if it wasn't for me as a

server they wouldn't know what to order. I present them with things they might never have tried and match their tastes. They usually come back wanting it exactly the same way.

What is your favorite thing about your job?

I enjoy meeting new people and seeing new faces each and every day. You never know who you might meet. I serve people from all over the world. The atmosphere and the surrounding area are also very nice. Being involved with the Greek community feels a lot like being at home for me. We also have a lot of regulars so you get to know the people.

What is your least favorite thing about being a waiter?

The slow season. The economy has affected my job. I work here five days a week and every day is a surprise.

How do you get through the day?

I work double shifts a lot, but I get through it. I meet new people every day and I'm used to it and balance work and family life pretty well. I have older kids at home that help out and that makes things easier.

Do you like Greek food?

Oh yes! I love Greek food, but I explore every region's food. I love to entertain. I even have some of my regulars over for barbecues and I cook up everything from American to Greek food.

If you weren't a waiter, what would you do?

I am a good bartender, or I could even do management. Either way I would want to do something in the hospitality industry.

How much does a waiter make?

It varies. It could be anywhere from \$20 to \$100 a day. It could be more or it could be less. Maybe you're only working one shift and it's a slow day and you walk out with just \$20 in your pocket. You never know. The busiest season is during the winter because all the people from up north come down here and we stay busy for a good three to four months.

What does it take to be a good waiter?

Be able to relate to the guests. You have to be friendly. Be prepared for a quick pace and to help each other out. All of us servers here help each other out. Everybody looks out for one another.