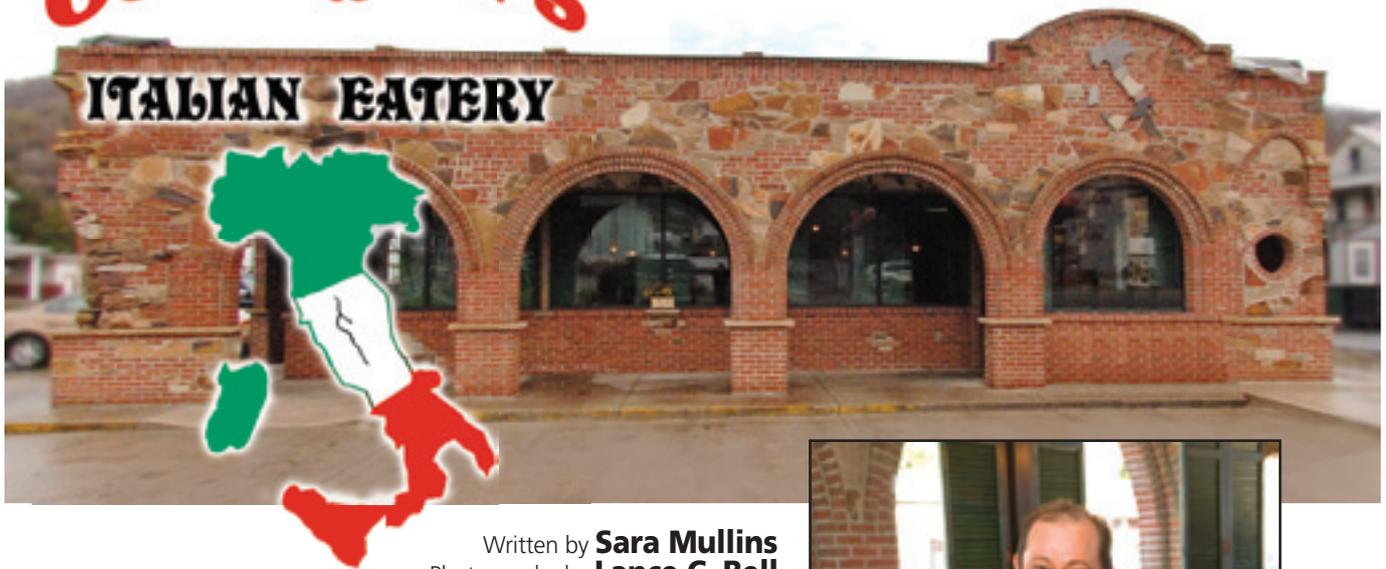


Castiglia's "BUON APPETITO"



Written by **Sara Mullins**
Photography by **Lance C. Bell**

KEYSER, WEST VIRGINIA may seem like an unlikely place to find an authentic Italian restaurant, but Castiglia's Italian Eatery has flourished in this small college town for over a decade by offering a delectable combination of great food and friendly service in a convenient location that was once home to a Mister Donut.

Word travels fast among those who travel. In 2002, only five years after the eatery opened, noted journalist and food columnist David Shribman sang the praises of Castiglia's in the pages of *Fortune Magazine*. A copy of the article is posted in the entryway.

Situated at the busy intersection of Mineral and Chestnut Streets, Castiglia's (pronounced "Cas - tee - yas") offers an impressive variety of choices, all made from scratch with fresh ingredients. Specialty items like high-quality cheeses and meats arrive weekly by the truckload from a supplier in New Jersey. Portions are generous, so come hungry. Hand-tossed pizzas, Italian rolls and baked specialties like stromboli and calzone feature freshly made dough. Chef Gerardo Castiglia's homemade tomato sauce appears in a bevy of pasta dishes, including five varieties of spaghetti. Subs range from hot to cold, and hamburgers are made with Angus beef. Popular appetizers and side orders, several salad selections and a zuppa del giorno (soup of the day) round out the menu. For those with a sweet tooth, Castiglia's offers Italian favorites — tira mi su, cannoli and amaretto cheesecake. This is not low-cal eating, but who cares, with food this tasty?



Gerardo

For Gerardo (above) and his wife Rosaria (right), owning and operating a restaurant seems pre-ordained, given their family histories. Both were born into "restaurant families" with roots in Naples, Italy. At age 17, Gerardo moved to the United States from Naples where he and four brothers soon established restaurants in Front Royal, Culpepper and Winchester, Va. Rosaria was raised in Brooklyn, NY, by Neopolitan parents she calls "restaurant gypsies," who left the city to set up pizzerias in places like Bedford, Pa., Berryville, Va., and Lebanon, Pa. After Gerardo and Rosaria met and married, they settled in Winchester, worked in the Castiglia family restaurant and began a family. Their son Onofrio is named after Gerardo's father, and their daughter Giovanna, born a year later, bears the name of Gerardo's mother.

One day, Gerardo drove through Keyser and thought it looked like a nice, safe place to raise his children. The family moved there in January, 1997, and by the following September, Keyser's Castiglia's Italian Eatery was open for business. Several years later, daughter Maria – named after Rosaria's mother – was born. Rosaria's brother Tony joined them as part of the family team.



Now a loyal clientele packs Castiglia's on a regular basis. Gerardo oversees all food preparation while Rosaria greets customers with a smile, answers the phone and serves as general "troubleshooter and peacemaker" while managing it all with aplomb. At peak times, it's a challenge to find a parking spot, not to mention a seat within the restaurant.

And so Rosaria and Gerardo decided to renovate the restaurant to better accommodate a growing number of customers and realize their dream: to create a "rustic, old world" atmosphere reminiscent of their Italian heritage. To achieve their goals, they needed to find somebody simpatico with the right skills.

Fortune smiled upon them when they found Wes Boddy, a stonemason and bricklayer who had found his way to the Keyser area from Walkerton, Ontario 500 miles to the north in Canada. While driving through Keyser, Gerardo spotted Wes working on a building owned by a law firm. Gerardo was sufficiently impressed with Wes' handiwork that he asked Wes to help renovate Castiglia's.

Wes agreed and began by creating a stone arch within the restaurant, in a nook to the right of the counter where customers place their orders. Outside, he continued the arch theme via colonnades to the front and left side, with ceilings of barn wood salvaged from a local farm that are visible from inside. In the brickwork above the doorway, he crafted a stone map of Italy from a template he made from a pizza box. The outside wall of a future dining room incorporates native stones placed in random patterns amidst the warm brick colors, accented with a gothic arch,



Wes Boddy, stonemason and bricklayer in front of his skilled handy work at Castiglia's.

a doorway with Roman arch and a circle. Part of the master plan is a patio for outdoor dining ("an Italian custom," according to Rosaria) with a gate and a fountain. Rosaria has plans for the mixer that remains out front which was bought from an old bakery in Virginia – she wants to give it a new life as a fountain with a planter. Interior updates like new light fixtures, rustic colors of paint and a new sound system are also in the works.

"My name is on this," Wes says of the restaurant. He uses stones from near his home and throughout Mineral County, a treasure trove of distinctive stones and fossils. It's a stonemason's version of heaven.

continued on page 54

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Castiglia's continued from page 53

At age 14, Wes discovered stonemasonry while perusing the book "The Art of the Stonemason," tucked away in his father's bookshelf. "Everything I saw in the book came alive," he says. After working for several years in other trades, Wes decided to gauge his interest in stonemasonry by building a stone planter, arch and pillars in his family's back yard. "I found my niche," he says. For several years, he learned the basics of the trade from a third-generation stonemason from Scotland, established his own business – Stoneworks – and then took time off to complete a Heritage Restoration stonemasonry program at Algonquin College in Perth. With a toolbox of new skills, he went back to work, constructing custom homes, golf course bridges, pool decking and fireplaces, with a touch of rock carving along the way.

Wes decided to take a break from work and traveled to West Virginia, where his brother Tim had settled after marrying Rachel Pancake of Keyser. And that's how he met his wife Naomi, Rachel's sister. Wes and Naomi have two children, with a third on the way. He's now planning to build a home using, not surprisingly, mass masonry techniques – with a turret as the starting point.

Rosaria and Gerardo are more than pleased with Wes and his workmanship. "We can't say enough good things about this man," Rosaria says. "He reads our minds. It couldn't have been done any better. And we've become friends."

"It's been so much fun," says Wes. "Where do you stop? You figure it out as you go. There's so much opportunity for creativity. What matters is that it looks good."

The fact that the Castiglia family has embarked upon this renovation reflects Gerardo's commitment to his adopted West Virginia home. "We are so very grateful for the incredible support we have received from the Keyser community," he says.

Castiglia's Italian Eatery – 304-788-1300
Wes Boddy – 304-749-7896