



"Ponce es Ponce..."

Especially when it comes to fine dining

By Florencio Marina Duran

After 10 years earning Europeans' culinary respect, Executive Chef Steve Hewins brings his unique Italian-inspired touch to Costa Caribe Golf & Country Club's Acqua Pazza Restaurant in Ponce. We chatted with the kitchen master about his extension of Naples' gastronomic delights to Puerto Rican tables.

How did your passion for food originate?

I grew up going out for dinner. My mother was not a cook, so we would do it, if not 365 days a year, pretty close to it. So I developed an interest for restaurant food and how it came to be, and I used to come home and try to duplicate it. I had done some work for the Ritz Carlton in Atlanta during college. The guy who used to cut my mother's hair happened to cut the hair of the VP of Operations for the Ritz and they did me a favor really, because I didn't know anything about [cooking], and I got to work with a lot of great people that got

me off on the right foot. Afterwards, I decided to learn how to do it well and went to the Culinary Institute of America in New York and got educated in classical techniques.

From where do you draw your inspiration?

From my mother-in-law. That's a woman who's had four strokes and comes from a butcher's family. Nothing is wasted in countries where there has been a major war. She's told stories of how the Germans [during WWII] would take the best parts of the animals and leave the bad parts, and they'd have to make do with them. To this day, she would never throw anything away that can be used. They've learned how to keep things simple.

How would you describe the Acqua Pazza experience?

The place has a fantastic ocean view and Acqua Pazza [Italian for crazy water and a cooking method for fish] gets the freshest fish from Cape Cod

every day to make the aforementioned dish after which the restaurant is named. Water, extra virgin olive oil, small tomatoes, and a little salt, among other ingredients, are used. It's very good.

What does the future hold for Acqua Pazza?

We've been growing slow but steady, because fast growth is usually short-lived. This is how I like it. We're doing very well every night. We have a monthly wine dinner that brings people like Chi Chi Rodriguez and others and it's always a hit. If what we're doing now is any indication, the sky is the limit, and we'll soon have to tell people it's full. I would very much like to have my reservation sheet just full every night. You can call (787) 812-2850 for reservations. Right now, we only open Wednesday thru Saturday, although I'm thinking of expanding that by one day. Private events can also be arranged in advance, as it already happens.