



## What's Cooking In Chesapeake

*"Simply Culinary" provides the goods you'll need to cook, and the know-how to use them*

BY KRISTEN DE DEYN KIRK

"I WILL TRANSLATE IT FOR YOU," says Randy Polley, owner of Simply Culinary, a cooking school-kitchen supply store-cheesecake-and-coffee shop in Towne Place at Greenbrier, "but I won't tell you what it means."

Randy is looking at a small sign above the 12-foot granite island in his business' state-of-the-art kitchen. It reads "in Bocca al Lupo:"

*In the mouth of the wolf.*

"It goes with this," Randy says, pointing to his chef's jacket and Simply Culinary's logo of a wolf with a frying pan in his hand. "We want customers to go home and look it up, keep them thinking about us."

(Go ahead and Google it. You'll learn why you should respond with, "Crepil lupu/may the wolf die.")

While Randy used to be in food service

management, he's more of a marketer these days, devoting much of his time to promoting the Simply Culinary name.

Last year around this time, just before he and his wife, Shelia, opened the business, the name was different. A store in Williamsburg cried foul, saying they had the name first. A few months and \$35,000 later, Randy changed the name — even though he says he had followed all the rules to obtain the first one legally.

"It would have cost \$100,000 to win the fight," he says.

Not everything goes perfectly when opening a business, that's for sure. Shelia notes that different businesses were supposed to be located next to Simply Culinary, high-end national retail stores, which she believes would have attracted more customers. As bad luck would have it, one changed its location in the shopping center and the other headed to a mall.

When the spa next door opened, she thought maybe new customers would stop in, but most make a beeline for their massage on the way in and then their car on the way out. She worries about the windows, too. Hers are so dark that passersby say, "You're Open sign isn't on."

But it is. She posts a smaller, lettered sign to compensate. Across the parking lot, the windows on other businesses are reflective. Not exactly inviting because you can't see what's inside.

"Most people come to the restaurants," says Shelia of the shopping center. "They park their cars and fill the parking lot and go right to the restaurants."

What Shelia would really like is to ease out of her emergency room nursing job. She works two night shifts after working a full week at Simply Culinary. Her motivation: Health insurance benefits while the business gets off the ground.

Randy racks up about 75 hours a week. It's

**POTS AND PANS:** Shelia and Randy Polley store offers the equipment needed to pull off the culinary exploits they teach. (left)

**LIKE A KNIFE THROUGH BUTTER:** Randy Polley's kitchen offers students instruction for cooking creative meals. (opposite page)

the schedule he used to keep when traveling the country for his food service job, but a definite change from the mid-life break he took a few years back.

"He was tending bar and helping people with their golf games. He wasn't getting paid for that," Shelia says. "I came home one day and said 'this is what we're going to do.'"

Randy interjects: "It was great while it lasted!"

Shelia noticed how happy her husband was when he brought home work friends and taught them to cook. The same thing would happen when the couple hosted dinner parties; Randy would take over as instructor. Plus, he baked cheesecakes for friends and friends of friends. The final clincher in starting the business: Chesapeake didn't have a kitchen retail store.

"You know the show Take Home Chef?," asks Shelia, referring to The Learning Channel show in which Chef Curtis Stone meets a woman in a grocery store and then goes to her home to prepare a simple yet delicious meal. "He's always running into Sur La Table to get a gift that's kitchen related. That's what we have."

At Simply Culinary, Randy now gets paid to teach.

**Simply Culinary**  
 Towne Place at Greenbrier  
 717 Eden Way North, Chesapeake  
 214-9231  
[www.simply-culinary.com](http://www.simply-culinary.com)

**Upcoming classes include:**  
**Tapas Party**  
 March 5, 6 p.m.

**Kids in the Kitchen International**  
 March 8, 1 p.m.

**An Evening in Germany**  
 March 11, 6 p.m.

teach. About a dozen times a month, he leads two-and-a-half hour, hands-on cooking classes. He and Shelia say they're the only local business that offers participants the opportunity to cook instead of merely observe.

While the Polleys would like more kitchenware sales, they're happy with the success of their classes. Many sell out.

"I explain why I use the knife I use, why I use the pan I use, why I use the gadget I

use," says Randy, who also worked as executive chef at Lock's Pointe in Chesapeake from 1998 to 2002. "We have the best stuff you can get and you can play with it all when you take a class."

And, ideally, you'll then purchase the knives, pans and gadgets.

Shelia is surprised by how many men take classes.

Randy likes when couples come in for date night.

"You get to eat everything you make," says Randy. The \$50 fee is reasonable when you consider that it would be hard to eat at a fine dining restaurant for that amount.

The kitchen seats 18 at high tables and one more person, a sous (French for "under") chef, joins the group. Randy offers the apprenticeship to anyone who has taken two of his classes and is willing to help for free.

An equal number of people gather in the kitchen when Randy shoots segments for WCTV 48, Chesapeake's city channel. They air on TV every day but Wednesday and can be viewed through Cox On Demand. Tune into Channel 1 and check out the Free Zone.

Coming soon is a 30-minute show.

Randy insists he's not one of those ego-



driven chefs, the kind who cares more about ratings than fresh ingredients. He's motivated by a desire to bring families back together.

After all, telling families "in bocca al lupo" might help them in the future, (you've looked up the expression, right?), but teaching them

how to share a great joy in life is a better idea.

"My show and the store give you a tangible way to reunite the family through the kitchen," he says. "Studies show kids who eat with their family are 15 to 20 percent more likely to succeed in life." ●

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