

Jasper's Chef Is Cooking Following Food Network Fame

New business arrives every night for restaurateur following contest win

By **Katy Moore**
 Staff Writer

For one local chef, growing up with the idea of owning his own restaurant was a thrill in itself.

Winning a cooking competition on network television against a nationally-renowned chef was unimaginable.

But that's where Jasper's head chef and owner **Kent Rathbun** recently scored big, beating out Food Network star Bobby Flay and winning an *Iron Chef America* cooking competition. Now, the restaurateur in the Shops at Legacy says winning a famed cooking challenge has brought new business and renewed interest to his 5-year-old West Plano eatery.

"Every single night, I'm meeting people that are here in the restaurant who say they saw me on *Iron Chef*," Rathbun said. "The notoriety of that show has definitely helped our business."

Rathbun's show aired earlier this spring. It started when he and his brother, Kevin Rathbun,

an Atlanta-based restaurant owner, were giving a demonstration while cooking at the Aspen Culinary School. When it was over, one of the diners approached Kent Rathbun, gave him a business card, and told him he would be getting a date on *Iron Chef America*.

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"It was really a matter of being in the right place at the right time," Rathbun said of that initial invitation. The guest was in charge of booking new talent to compete on the nationally-televised culinary game show.

Iron Chef America features two chefs, the iron chef and a contender. The four iron chefs who alternate to compete all each Food Network stars. The two competitors have one hour to create five dishes using a featured ingredient.

Rathbun and Flay created dishes featuring elk. At the end of the competition, the dishes are placed before a panel of judges to be evaluated for originality, presentation, and flavor.

"It's not often that the iron chef loses, so we were happy to be there and even more happy to win," Rathbun said.

Following the competition, Jasper's included the five elk dishes on its menu, creations including an elk carpaccio, elk tenderloin with mole, elk meatball carbonara, elk in Gruyère





PHOTO: CHELCEY ADAMI

Kent Rathbun, executive chef at Jasper's and recent winner of the *Iron Chef* competition, tests black bean soup before starting the day, cheese, and an elk loin topped with a Shiner Bock beer barbecue sauce.

"You have to do things that are simple but nice and you have to concern yourself with presentation and flavor," Rathbun said. "It's pretty intense. You've got your head down and you're moving pretty fast for an hour. There are no do-overs."

Rathbun founded the Dallas restaurant Abacus in 1999, and Jasper's opened its doors in Plano in 2003. Jasper's has expanded to include locations in Houston and Austin.

He and Kevin both started out in the restaurant business when they were teenagers. Kent Rathbun remembers watching his mother work in restaurants when he was young, but he also cites his work under chefs at the Mansion on Turtle Creek, the Dallas Museum of Art's 1717, and American Restaurant in Kansas City.

Jasper's, he said, encompasses his favorite type of food that he calls "gourmet backyard cuisine."

"It's food that a lot of people would cook on Sunday at a backyard barbecue," he said.

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PHOTO: CHELCEY ADAMI

Kent Rathbun, executive chef at Jasper's and recent winner of the *Iron Chef* competition, goes over the specials of the day and educates his staff about the food.