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### Base chef creates meals with panache

**By: Jomay Steen, Journal staff**

For Staff Sgt. Rhodello Nuval of Ellsworth Air Force Base, cooking is more than his military job, it is his art. Evidence of this is found on his culinary Web site, Nuval.net, which opens with, "Cooking is not just simply cooking to feed people. It is an art that helps tantalize the palate of your guests, family members or patrons."

As his job, Nuval works for hours at the base kitchen to feed the service personnel. But he's often the go-to guy to cook up feasts for base deployments, dinner parties for friends and children's birthday parties.

Recently Nuval created two no-fuss, affordable dishes that easily could feed drop-by visitors or be served for Sunday dinner. The main dishes required about 40 minutes from preparation to finish,

leaving plenty of time to put together a salad and side dish. "I fell in love with Italian wines while in Italy. It brings extra flavor into the sauce," he said.

Master Sgt. Jesse Barcega stopped by the kitchen to taste Nuval's Lemon Herbed Tenderloin with a blueberry coulis sauce drizzled across the plate. Barcega knew he was in for a delicious treat.

"We rarely do this type of cooking at our kitchens," he said.

As expected, the pork drew praises from the EAFB head of food services.

"It has a spicy taste, but not too spicy. It's very juicy," he said after taking another bite.

"The tenderness is perfect."

Barcega quizzed Nuval on the amount of time the young cook let the meat rest before carving the tenderloin into medallion-sized pieces. Nuval generally waits for a minute or so. After the discussion, Barcega advised for a longer wait time.

"Don't cut meats fresh from the oven. Let the steam cook and seal the juices in ... so let it rest for three minutes," Barcega said. "But he's the chef."

It is advice heeded by Nuval, who oversees four noncommissioned officers and 16 airmen to complete the daily meals at the base. It is a job at which he not only excels, but also enjoys.

"It's not only my job, it's my passion," he said of cooking.

At a surprise going-away party for Technical Sgt. Wesley Williams, a culinary chef stationed at Ellsworth and one of Nuval's mentors, Nuval created a five-course meal for Williams and friends that included pork tenderloin, penne pasta in pesto sauce and a chocolate souffle.

Receiving his basic training in food services at Lowery Air Force Base, Aurora, Colo., Nuval says that the chocolate souffle was the inspiration of The Food Network rather than his military training.

"Everything we do here is regimented with set guidelines," Nuval said.

But his travels abroad as well as at home have allowed his culinary skills to grow, including the addition of sweet wines from Italy to enhance his orange sauce for his Salmon Sunrise, learning food tips and

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seasoning tricks from the local cooks who operated eateries near base when Nuval was stationed in South Korea; and the elegance and immensity of the menu items prepped and served daily from the Bellagio Casino's kitchens in his hometown of Las Vegas.

The 36-year-old husband and father inherited his cooking prowess from his mother, who owned and operated a small restaurant in their Philippine homeland before moving stateside. Nuval learned his kitchen duties early in his life.

"Mom loved to cook," he said.

Growing up in Las Vegas, he worked his way up to assistant manager of a fast food restaurant before enlisting in the Air Force. In his new career, his goals of owning his own restaurant evolved to becoming a general's aid and serving as top flight cook to the general's cooking staff.

It was when he was stationed in Keflavik, Iceland, that Nuval walked on the wild side of cooking. "I was allowed to be creative. We got to play with recipes and use a different variety of foods," he said.

His Icelandic experience has served him well, and he continues to use that experience when creating new recipes, testing them on friends and families and posting them to his Web site. Entertaining with a dinner party at least once a month, he has tried to stay with a philosophy of ease, affordability and simplicity. It works, he says.

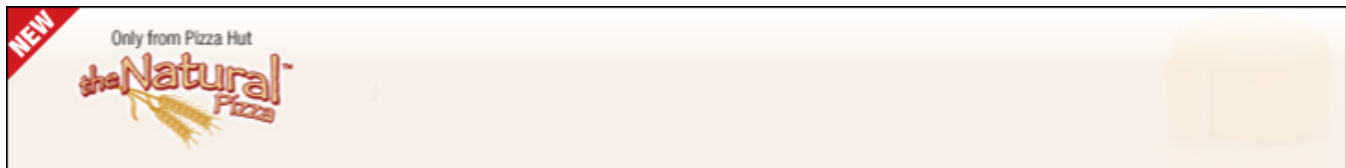
"It doesn't have to be difficult to cook a nice meal," he said.

Although not allowed to cook with wines at the Bandit Inn Food Facility, Nuval says the use of a sweet Italian wine as the main liquid in his orange sauce will accent the flavor.

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