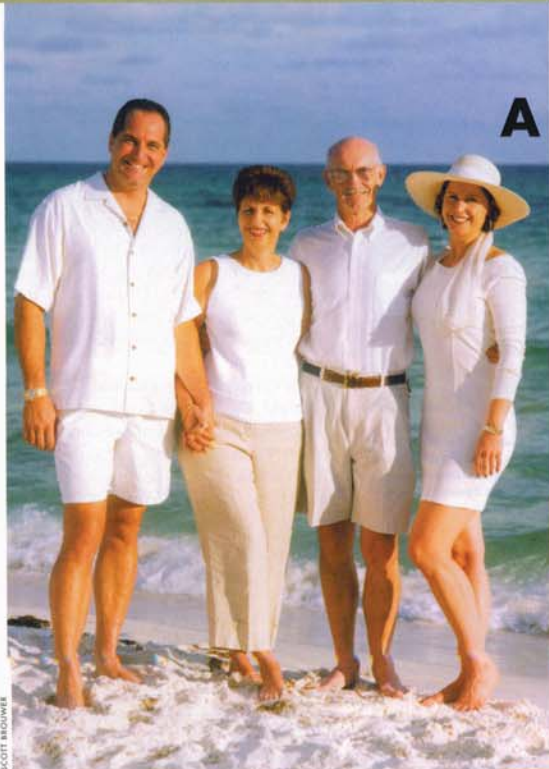


EMERALD COAST

OCT-NOV 2004

CHEF'S CHOICE | BY T. BART PFANKUCH



A FAMILY AFFAIR

CREEHAN FAMILY
COLLABORATES TO
MAKE SON TIM A
RISING STAR

The name atop the menu reads "Chef Tim Creehan's Beach Walk Café," but it takes a bevy of Creehans to make the highly successful restaurant, catering business and cookbook publishing enterprise work.

Chef Tim's mother, Marybeth, often answers the phone and handles catering and special events. His sister, Denise Creehan, handles all the publicity for Tim and the restaurant and designs all menus, press releases and cookbooks published by Creehan Publishing. Recently, Creehan's stepson, Justin, visited from California for the summer and worked at Beach Walk as a dishwasher and salad-maker.

And then there's Tim's father, John, who perhaps has the best job in the family. John Creehan is a handyman who makes occasional deliveries but is also the designated taster of all new food items whipped up by one of Florida's most prominent, well-known chefs.

Tim Creehan credits the involvement of

The successful enterprises of Chef Tim Creehan (above left) are a testament to his talents and to his family, who are active in his endeavors. (Above right) Smoked Tomato and Shrimp Soup, the recipe is on page 146.

his entire family – and key staff people like his partner, Jose Cruz – for making his restaurant and growing culinary empire so successful. "It was a dream of mine," Creehan said. "My dream was to build a big and strong enough business where I could bring my family into it and we could spend time together."

So far, it has worked to perfection. Creehan and his Beach Walk Café have been among the most decorated on the Emerald Coast since the restaurant opened in April 1998 inside The Inn at Crystal Beach, 2996 Scenic Highway 98

in Destin. Creehan and his Gulf-front restaurant have won no fewer than 20 awards for service, food quality and ambiance. Creehan has won numerous culinary contests and awards, including "Best Chef" in the annual "Best of the Emerald Coast" contest held by *Emerald Coast Magazine* three years running (he's this year's winner, too). Beach Walk has also won a multitude of accolades, including designation as a Top 25 Restaurant in Florida by Florida Trend magazine, a Wine Spectator Award for serving great wines and a Three Dia-

SMOKED TOMATO AND SHRIMP SOUP

- 2 yellow onions
- 4 tomatoes
- 1/3 pound chopped bacon
- 1/4 cup chopped garlic
- 3 cups canned Italian plum tomatoes
- 3 cups tomato sauce
- 1/2 cup tomato paste
- 2 canned chipotle peppers in adobo sauce
- 1 1/2 quarts chicken stock
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 2 cups heavy cream
- salt & black pepper to taste
- 1 pound steamed shrimp (70-90 count)
- 1/4 cup chopped parsley or chive stems

Sprinkle wood chips onto a smoker or charcoal grill and preheat. Cut onions in half and place on smoker rack with whole tomatoes. Smoke over low heat 30 minutes. Allow to cool and chop.

Saute bacon in heavy soup pot. Add onions, tomatoes and garlic. Cook for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add next six ingredients, mix well. Simmer 20 minutes more.

Process mixture in batches in a blender or food processor until smooth. Combine mixture in soup pot and stir in cream. Season with salt and pepper and heat to serving temperature. Ladle into bowls and top with steamed shrimp and parsley or chive stems. Serves 12.

“You need to have trustworthy people in place, and when you bring family into an operation, you have an advanced level of trust.”

— Tim Creehan



His many awards and two published cookbooks have sent Tim Creehan on the path to the title “celebrity chef,” which has a double meaning because he’s also cooked for famous people who live in or have visited the Emerald Coast.

mond ranking by AAA.

While Creehan, 38, said it’s nice to work so closely with his family, he also lauds the trust level he is able to obtain with family members so involved in the

business. “The restaurant business is a very difficult one, and a lot of your controls are in the hands of other people,” Creehan said. “You need to have trustworthy people in place, and when you bring family into an operation, you have an advanced level of trust.”

Denise Creehan, who is intimately involved in promoting her brother and his restaurant, uses the expertise from her design firm (Designs by Denise) to produce all written and photographic material for the restaurant. Denise joked that she gets so involved that “people sometimes think I’m Tim’s wife when they see my last name.”

The Creehan family followed Tim to the Emerald Coast a few years ago after he established himself as an up-and-coming culinary force. A native of Baton Rouge, La., Creehan began cooking at age 14 in a Steak & Ale restaurant. After training with top chefs from across the country and in Hong Kong and Tokyo, Creehan landed in Destin where he co-founded the Marina Café. After a decade there, he jumped out on his own and opened Beach Walk, and he hasn’t looked back.

In the forward to his latest cookbook, “Simple Cuisine,” Emerald Coast chef Tim Creehan describes his philosophy for cooking great meals. Creehan states that he wants readers of the cookbook to “cook from the heart and provide the soul” for the year by Creehan Publishing. Creehan, chef and owner of the Beach Walk Café in Destin, also shares his longtime mantra for how he approaches food: “Find the best and freshest ingre-

of the Gulf Coast” is selling well. “With my first book, it took five years to sell 1,000 copies,” he said. “But this book has sold 1,000 copies already and that’s great for a regional cookbook.”

Here are two recipes that are indicative of the quality of the dishes and simplicity of creation of other recipes in the book. “Simple Cuisine” can be purchased by calling (850) 231-4564 or (877) 734-9532, or by visiting www.creehanpublications.com.

ASPARAGUS SALAD WITH REGGIANO CREAM DRESSING

- Cream Dressing**
- 1 1/2 cups sour cream
 - 1/2 cup red wine vinegar
 - 1 tablespoon chopped garlic
 - 1 cup grated reggiano cheese
 - 1 black pepper to taste
- Salad**
- 8 slices pancetta (Italian bacon)
 - 40 medium asparagus stalks
 - 8 green onions
 - 1 roasted red pepper, julienned

To make dressing, combine first four ingredients in a bowl and mix well. Season with pepper and chill until serving time.

Then, preheat oven to 350 degrees and bake pancetta on baking sheet until crisp and brown. Drain and set aside. Steam or boil asparagus just until tender-crisp. Steam green onions until wilted. Arrange asparagus stalks in bunches of five and tie each bunch with a green onion. Spoon dressing onto eight plates and stand asparagus groups upright topped with pancetta and red pepper. Serves eight.



Asparagus Salad with Reggiano Cream Dressing

Vince Gill and Amy Grant. That celebrity dinner garnered Creehan coverage in national magazines like People.

Creehan said he isn’t pressing to become a nationally known celebrity chef who could have an entire industry based on his cooking style, personality and dishes like chef’s Emeril Lagasse and Bobby Flay. “When I started in this business, a chef or a cook was considered the same as a mechanic or janitor,” he said. “I love

food, and it’s just a bonus that chefs have become celebrities. But I don’t have a desire to be the next Emeril because I used to talk to Emeril all the time but now that he’s a celebrity he has become unapproachable.”

Publicity maven Denise, however, is pushing her brother’s celebrity. “We’re working on him being the next big thing,” she said. “He’s getting a boost from the exposure he’s built up over the past few years and we’re taking it to the next step.” Denise Creehan said the Grant-Gill wedding was a great starting point toward that end. “It’s huge,” she said. “It’s opened up so many doors.”

Tim Creehan said he enjoys the fact people like his restaurant and food because pleasing customers remains his top focus. “If celebrity fell in my lap, I would do whatever came my way,” he said. “But the best time for me is 6 p.m. on Friday night when we’re all here and getting geared up to make a hundred people happy and feed them well for a night.”

Lately, Creehan has begrudgingly entered a new world — that of celebrity chef, at least on a regional level. Creehan has cooked for celebrities such as Cybil Shepherd, Timothy Hutton, Debra Winger, Katherine Crosby, Vince Neil of rock band Motley Crue and Emerald Coast resident Wayne Rogers of “MASH” fame. But Creehan’s most attention-grabbing endeavor came when he cooked the wedding dinner for country music stars