

Olean man trades in chef's hat for former passion

Carl Vahl returns to open new law practice

By **Kate Day Sager**
Olean Times Herald

OLEAN — In his career as a chef, Carl Vahl traveled to Italy for training, opened his own restaurant in Baltimore and worked many long hours.

It was for the latter reason that Mr. Vahl decided to return to his first profession, law, while keeping his passion for cooking as an avocation.

Mr. Vahl, who operated a general legal practice in the Olean area between 1986 and 2010 before leaving for a culinary career, recently returned to the area to open a new law practice.

"I decided to come back because my restaurant didn't make it financially and after eight months I closed it," Mr. Vahl said during an interview at his office located in Holiday Park Centre. "I was disappointed, but then I landed a really awesome job as an executive chef for the Della Notte Italian restaurant in Baltimore."

Mr. Vahl said he worked at the upscale restaurant for three months and enjoyed it, but found the schedule difficult to handle.

"I really loved it at first, but it was 14-hour days and, at the age of 54 I just about collapsed," he said. "I realized I couldn't do it. I hated to admit that to myself."

He said he was grateful to have a law practice to fall back on in his home state.

A native of Jamestown and graduate of Vermont Law School, he had practiced divorce and real estate law for close to 25 years in

the Olean area. While he had a successful law practice, he decided to embark on a culinary career because of his lifelong love for cooking. In recent years, he had enjoyed hosting dinner parties for friends and associates. His cooking skills were so well-known in the Olean area that his dinner parties to collect funds for the Olean Rotary Club, of which he's a member, raised significant money for African water well projects and polio eradication. While vacationing in Italy in the past, Mr. Vahl took recreational cooking classes. This eventually led to formal training at the International Culinary Center in New York City and the ALMA International School of Italian Cuisine in Parma, Italy. After graduating from the program in October of 2010, Mr. Vahl eventually opened his former restaurant, Calle's Cucina, in Baltimore.

He said the move back to the Southern Tier was easy as he has family and friends in the area. In addition, he has moved back into activities with the Olean Rotary Club and community organizations.

"I have a lot of connections to the community and I'm feeling good about it," Mr. Vahl said.

His cooking skills are not being wasted as he plans to teach culinary classes and knife skills at CUTCO Cutlery.

"I can teach people how to use those extremely sharp knives because there are techniques to use," he said. Mr. Vahl also plans



Kate Day Sager/Olean Times Herald
Attorney Carl Vahl recently returned to law practice in Olean after working as a chef for the past several years.

to conduct in-home fine dining for social events and parties.

"I'll go to the house, cook the food and serve it," he explained. "People can watch and we'll give cooking lessons. It's a lovely thing."

He also expects to use his exper-

tise in law to help organizations such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness-Cattaraugus.

"I'll be doing a presentation on special-needs trusts and guardianship," Mr. Vahl said of the Feb. 11 program for the alliance.

His Rotary Club ties, both in Baltimore and Olean, have also inspired him to continue with water-well projects in Africa.

"We're up to 56 wells (built) in Africa," Mr. Vahl said. After leaving his chef job this past summer, Mr. Vahl traveled to Niger to work out details on the repairs of a couple of wells.

The clean water provided by the wells is desperately needed in many African communities.

"It really is the number-one killer; 8,000 kids a day die because of water-related health issues," he noted.

In his free time, Mr. Vahl plans to visit with his father and brother who live in Chautauqua County and get back to the ski slopes in the area.

"My father is thrilled that I'm back in the area," he said.

For more information, contact Mr. Vahl at his office at Suite 510, Holiday Park Centre, online at carl-vahlesq@msn.com or call 790-8231.

Dennis Casey, a longtime friend of Mr. Vahl's and a fellow Rotarian, said he was pleased that his friend has returned to Olean.

Mr. Casey said he believes Mr. Vahl is a great chef and admires him for embarking on another career. At the same time, he said he is glad Mr. Vahl is returning to his law practice, as he will be a wonderful addition to the community.

"The Rotary and Olean will definitely benefit from Carl's return," Mr. Casey said.

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