



A CONVERSATION WITH TONY MANTUANO

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY jeff kauck

In an era of celebrity chefs with oversized egos, Chef Tony Mantuano is a breath of fresh air: a genuinely down-to-earth, regular sort of guy, who for the past 23 years has been a key player on the Chicago restaurant scene at the helm of the critically acclaimed Spiaggia restaurant. Spiaggia, located at the fashionable intersection of North Michigan Avenue and Oak Street, steps away from Gucci and Prada, holds the distinction of being the only four-star rated Italian restaurant in the Windy City.

Before Spiaggia, Mantuano spent a year cooking in Italy in several Michelin-starred restaurants to hone his already savvy culinary skills. Since that time, Mantuano has delighted in sharing sophisticated Italian food with Americans. Along with his wife Cathy, a food and wine expert, he has co-written two cookbooks: *The Spiaggia Cookbook: Eleganza Italiana in Cucina* in 2004 and *Wine Bar Food*. Released this past April, *Wine Bar Food* recounts their favorite experiences, while including recipes gleaned from visited wine bars in Italy and other cities throughout the Mediterranean region of Europe.

In 2005, Chef Mantuano received the James Beard Foundation's "Best Chef: Midwest" award and Spiaggia received the nomination for "Outstanding Restaurant

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in America" from the James Beard Foundation in both 2006 and 2007. The Mantuanos also own a family restaurant called Mangia Trattoria in Chef Tony's native Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Maintaining his connection with "the old country," Mantuano has installed a climate-controlled cheese cave at Spiaggia