

Anthony Bourdain business partner to open South Philly diner

In light of his friend's passing, South Philly resident and esteemed chef Michael DePasquale picks up plans to open diner in South Philly.



Grace Maiorano [Follow](#)

Dec 10 · 7 min read



Michael DePasquale at the Phat Pub in Maryland. (Photo special to South Philly Review)

Shortly after he received the news, South Philly resident and U.S. Culinary Ambassador Michael DePasquale wandered East Passyunk before dawn broke.

Moseying into a CVS, the only open store on an early June morning, the chef and cuisine magnate tried to make sense of the sudden passing of his beloved friend and business partner, Anthony Bourdain.

The gentlemen, whose food ventures crossed paths several times over the past decade, were on the brink of establishing their first joint project, the Broadway New York Cheesecake Company, a 24-hour iconic New York delicatessen-themed chain, which would open in four locations across the Northeast corridor, including one on South Street in Philadelphia.

Although the dust of the tragedy has not fully settled, DePasquale feels, in honor of his culinary confidant, their vision must live to see the light, as in February, the first of the chains will open at 15th and South streets.

“I think, just the legacy, to keep it going,” he said. “Me and him had something that we put together and worked on together, and our close bond of a friendship, I think it’s a honor for me to open a restaurant up and have his name on it and have memorabilia of him. Just to let people know out there the true man that he was and let all the other chefs know, as well, that who he was and who he made other people become, and what he did for me as a person.”

DePasquale, who has made a name for himself internationally through innovative dishes and eminent eateries along the East Coast since the late 1990s, recalled the genesis of their delicatessen franchise.

Inspired by the colossal cheesecakes sold at Carnegie Deli, an iconic chain in New York, DePasquale had recently fused the concept with his own singular cheesecake recipe while trying his hand at the city’s booming food cart business in 2016.

At the time, the pastries were being sold at a friend’s restaurant in Lower Manhattan when Bourdain strolled in one evening and found himself floored by the dessert.

“We were brainstorming that night and talking,” DePasquale recalled. “We’re just getting to know each other more and more. And he loved me, and I loved him, ya know, just the man that he is. He’s just so down to earth and loves to talk about his passion for food and is just a true advocate for the people out there, everywhere all over the world. This is a man that could walk into any country, no matter how hostile it is, and he’s welcome with open arms. That was just his nature, and I loved it.”

Although their friendship sparked that evening in the East Village, DePasquale had caught the attention of Bourdain nearly a decade earlier when the Baltimore native began making a name in the culinary sphere after opening inventive restaurants around the Mid-Atlantic Region.

DePasquale, who remembers duplicating his mother's recipes as early as 5 years old, began dabbling in local food opportunities after graduating high school. Through working for his father, who was in the vending machine business in Baltimore, DePasquale was eventually handed management of a bar in a local struggling seafood spot, Crew's Quarters, located in Essex, Maryland.

After the young man, who had recently retired his athletic endeavors to pursue his true zeal of cuisine, got his hands on the menu, DePasquale revamped the offerings with exclusive shrimp, crab cakes and steaks. While running the restaurant, which he says was suddenly flooded with patrons and praises, he also served as an officer on the Baltimore Police Department in between culinary classes.

"Culinary school was great," he said. "It teaches you everything. It teaches you a lot of the basics, but you have to have the passion in you. There's a lot of chefs out here, all over, but there are a few select that really have passion for what they do."

That passion eventually paved the way to his critically-acclaimed Phat Pug Coal Fired Pizza in 2006, which was frequented by local politicians and other notable individuals. Catching the eye of critics like "The Baltimore Sun's" Elizabeth Large, DePasquale's signature Neapolitan-style pies defied any misconceptions that coal-fire ovens weren't practical for the Maryland restaurant business.

After his secret sauce and dough recipe, which he says miraculously hindered any soginess, awed hundreds of crowds, he handed the business to owners and made his way to Miami where he stumbled into another supernova hotspot.

Partnering with prominent restaurant figure Doug McAllister, Ricky Williams from the Miami Dolphins, Rudi Johnson of the Cincinnati Bengals and NBA star Dennis Rodman, DePasquale opened Proof Open Drive, an upscale seafood scene, which experienced high-profile foot traffic from celebrities like Paris Hilton and the Trumps.

Although he'd eventually sell his share of the restaurant, and even went on to immerse in a Creole cuisine chain that was bought out by the BB King's Blues Club, DePasquale was hungry for his next meal.

“The restaurant business is sometimes, even if it’s the best around, it can be very short-lived,” he said. “It’s a tough business. It’s a lot of work.”

In 2013, after networking with a Japanese military ambassador and rancher, DePasquale started importing and exporting highly-demanded wagyu beef from the farms of Kagoshima to restaurants in Chicago and New York.

Still entrepreneuring the delicacy, he found himself in New York a few years later where he opened a few kabob skewers carts in Flushing, Queens and Upper Manhattan where he’d eventually have his fateful encounter with Bourdain.



Anthony Bourdain and DePasquale at Proof Ocean Drive in Miami.(Photo special to South Philly Review)

As they discussed visions for the diner, including featuring live local entertainment, collaged images of New York on the tables and free copies of New York publications, all of which will still come to fruition, DePasquale says the legendary chef and world traveler was adamant about putting a location in South Philadelphia.

“South Philly, as I said, Bourdain was a big, big supporter and fan of South Philadelphia,” DePasquale said. “He loved the Italian Market ...

just the mixture of every type of ethnic people here coming together in the market.”

DePasquale remembers his last encounter with Bourdain a few months before his passing, as the duo discussed life’s lessons, both inside and outside of the kitchen, over dumplings and sake in Queens.

In light of his friend’s alleged suicide, DePasquale says he’s conducting his own private investigation surrounding the circumstances of Bourdain’s death, including using resources from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the presidential cabinet.

“With his passing, it was a real shock to me, and I’m investigating it personally myself, because a lot of things just don’t add up and come together,” DePasquale said.

Around the the time of Bourdain’s death, DePasquale was appointed as a U.S. Culinary Ambassador. Inspired by Bourdain’s principles, he went to Washington, D.C., hoping to “spread the love of food through diplomacy all over the world.”

Spending two weeks out of the month in D.C., DePasquale manages dinners for foreign dignitaries, presidents and other distinguished political people. Recently, he catered a private event attended by the Kennedy family and prepared the menu at the the Embassy of Afghanistan.

“Food brings all people together, so, you can be out in the middle of a battlefield in a war. And, when it’s time to eat, your enemies, you can sit down at a table and break bread together and talk and eat together, and then, go back to war. It brings people together, and I can say, it brings everybody together. Because, you can sit with everybody and eat. Maybe you don’t agree with everybody’s views on things, but, if the food is good, and we’re all eating together, we all agree on that.”

While DePasquale is pouring his energy into the Broadway New York Cheesecake Company opening, and even into other pursuits such as the “2 a.m. Chef” TV show that explores restaurateurs’ after-hour places, he says he strives to give back to the community every day—a lifestyle undoubtedly followed by Bourdain.

DePasquale recently purchased a greenhouse for North Philly's Mary McLeod Bethune School where he plans to teach healthy cooking classes as part of his upcoming junior culinary ambassador program in the city.

Along with advocating at prisons and children's hospitals through Virginia and D.C., he recently nursed a Vietnam veteran back to health who was suffering from kidney and congestive heart failure using herbs recommended by Bourdain.

Whether surrounding recipes or virtues, DePasquale will evermore carry with him Bourdain's wisdom.

"Never let anything get the best of you," he would tell DePasquale. "So, to always think positive and always be patient with foods and be open to everyone, to keep your mind always open. And Tony was big with that, very open-minded and allowed everyone to come in, and that's how I run my daily life by what he taught me every day."

Follow Grace on Twitter at [@GraceMaiorano](https://twitter.com/GraceMaiorano)

