

Chef Dave...from Page 1A

National Kidney Foundation.

All costs associated with donating a kidney are covered under the Drakes' personal insurance, and folks can learn more about the process by calling Emory at 855-366-7989, and by emailing ChefDaveNeedsAKidney@gmail.com.

Regrettably, business has suffered at the restaurant since Chef Dave took ill about two years ago. He and Joan still work six days a week, but they've had to cut hours to accommodate his extensive medical treatments.

"We'd love to be open more, we'd love to do like we used to do," said Joan. "They said the minute that kidney goes into you, it's like you're a whole new person. You feel it immediately."

Added Dave, "Nothing they're doing actually takes the place of having a kidney. You just wish you could do more, and you just can't do it right now."

Regardless, Chef Dave is still cooking, baking and coming up with fresh ideas for dishes, all thanks to his strong work ethic and sturdy foundations in the kitchen.

Dave comes from a long line of traditional Italian cooks, and he grew up making great-tasting food with his family.

As a boy, he got his first restaurant job at the age of 13, and later in his youth, he learned everything there was to know about the restaurant industry at the prestigious Culinary Institute of America, which at the time was based in his home state of Connecticut.

In the 1970s, the Drakes moved around while working for a restaurant management company before settling down in Georgia and starting a restaurant of their own in 1979, where they employed about a dozen family members.

For years, they ran a popular Italian restaurant that eventually became a franchise business in Atlanta called Antonietta's, named after Dave's mother who sadly passed away earlier this year, and they even owned a successful jazz club.

In 1991, the couple fell in love with Blairsville after being introduced to the area through a real estate deal, so they moved here with their youngest son and opened up a restaurant, which still enjoys a

steady stream of customers to this day.

Not one to rest on his laurels, in 2000, the chef took on the challenge of simultaneously running the restaurant and teaching in the Culinary Arts program at North Georgia Technical College, and he ended up running the program in its entirety for several years before retiring in 2016.

While at North Georgia Tech, Chef Dave developed a reputation for always going to bat for his students, and he has helped many of them secure coveted positions in nearly every area of the food industry.

Chef Dave has assisted the people of the mountains in other ways over the years, too, having been a big local supporter of the Special Olympics, for example.

And after all these years of serving, teaching and helping others in the community, the Drakes are now reaching out for help in return to find Chef Dave a kidney.

Kidneys are vital organs that filter waste from the body, and Chef Dave's kidneys no longer function well enough to perform that job.

His kidneys have been in decline for quite some time, but up until recently, it had always

been manageable. He was still able to teach at the school, and he and Joan were still able to manage their restaurant with no problems.

About two years ago, however, Chef Dave's health took a turn for the worse, and he had to have surgery to enable an at-home treatment called peritoneal dialysis.

He has been able to continue working while undergoing dialysis, though the process has been difficult and tedious, consisting of several surgeries, expensive medical bills, multiple complications, and an untold number of out-of-town doctor visits.

Every single night, Dave must plug into a machine that pumps a special cleansing solution into the lining of his abdominal cavity, which absorbs toxins from his blood before being pumped back out of his body.

The routine requires Joan to spend 30 minutes each night setting the dialysis machine up for her husband, after which Dave must remain tethered to a 20-foot hose for 10 and a half hours, effectively restricting his movements and interrupting his sleep.

His nightly treatments, coupled with operating the restaurant six days a week, leave Chef Dave feeling exhausted much of the time, and he's hoping someone in the community will come forward to offer him some relief and maybe even save his life.

According to the National Kidney Foundation, the average life expectancy of a person on dialysis is five to 10 years. And even though many dialysis patients go on to live for 20 or 30 years, Joan and Dave know they need to find a living kidney donor as soon as possible.

Joan has consulted with Emory about donating one of her own kidneys to help her husband, though doctors don't recommend spouses go under the knife at the same time, as this could complicate the recovery process for both individuals.

The Drakes are people of faith, however, and they believe God will come through with a kidney for Dave.

Helping them in their quest for a kidney is their guardian angel on earth, Kim MacIsaac, who worked for the



Joan Drake with her Italian mother-in-law, Antonietta, who passed away earlier this year at the age of 92.

Drakes for a while in 1980 and reconnected with them out of the blue about five years ago.

She admires Chef Dave and cherishes the many memories she made working with him and his family all those years ago.

Since coming back into their lives, MacIsaac has grown close with the family, even committing to regular trips from Marietta to bring Dave's mother to visit him in Blairsville before she died.

MacIsaac was already familiar with organ transplants, as her husband donated a kidney to his brother about 20 years ago, so when she found out Chef Dave needed a kidney, she jumped at the chance to help her old friends.

In the last couple of years, she has devoted countless hours to finding a living kidney donor. She has experienced some success in her endeavors, too, with three people volunteering for tests to see if they qualify as donors.

Unfortunately, none of the people who have undergone testing so far have worked out, though MacIsaac and the Drakes are not giving up.

"It's crucial that when you decide to be a living donor you talk to your family and tell them your plans," said MacIsaac. "Do your research, even speak to the National Kidney Foundation so you get very educated and understand

what all is entailed before you make that first move.

"The reason I say this is because, if you start the process and pass the first couple tests, the hospital only does one testing at a time for a donor. It's expensive and time-consuming, so only one person at a time, and you can imagine the anxiety this causes Dave and Joan, because it could take months on one person to have them drop out."

As part of her efforts to spread the word about Chef Dave, MacIsaac has printed flyers and business cards, made up posters, started a social media campaign at "Chef Dave Drake Needs A Kidney" Facebook page, and set up the ChefDaveNeedsAKidney@gmail.com email address.

She has even put her personal information out there so that she can answer people's questions quickly and confidentially.

MacIsaac may be reached on her cellphone at 770-570-8263 or by email at kimmaci01@gmail.com.

And as always, Dave and Joan Drake can be found at Monet's Italian Grill & Pizzeria in Downtown Blairsville during business hours, which are Tuesday through Saturday from 4:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., and Sundays from 12 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Prescribed Fire Council holds first North Georgia meeting on June 6

**By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer**

The Georgia Prescribed Fire Council has historically met in Tifton, though the group held its inaugural North Georgia meeting in Jasper on June 6.

Fire professionals nationwide use prescribed burning, or controlled burning, to get rid of underbrush and other vegetative fuels in and around wildland areas, which helps to mitigate potentially catastrophic wildfires and meet other land management objectives.

Frank Riley of the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council said the June 6 meeting was the first time the Prescribed Fire Council had brought the U.S. Forest Service together with private landowners to talk about the practice of prescribed burning.

"Prescribed burning, as it applies to Union and Towns counties, means reduced fuel around neighborhoods and the forests around there," said Riley, who also assists in administering the Firewise Program in the state.

Added Riley, "So, if



Frank Riley

you get a lightning strike or a camper leaves a campfire burning and a wildfire gets out, then we've already prescribe burned around the community in the area and the fire won't have any fuel to burn."

To illustrate his point, Riley spoke of an 11,000-acre wildfire in rural southern New Jersey that took place earlier this year.

About two weeks prior to that fire, the local fire warden had done some routine prescribed fire burning along a roadway about five miles north of where the wildfire started.

When the fire got to the roadway, because there was no fuel for it to burn, the fire went out, likely sparing approximately 1,300 homes located five miles further on thanks to routine prescribed fire burning in that area.

And not only is prescribed burning a safety measure for communities, it is a tool used in forestry management to maintain biodiversity.

"Deer and turkey and all the wildlife in the forest subsist on forest grasses and flora," said Riley. "If the forest grows up into briars and sticks and rhododendron and laurel thickets, there's nothing for the wildlife to eat."

"So, when you burn it, it kills all those briars and bushes, and then the young grasses come back up and the wildlife has food. This is a natural phenomenon."

Riley said that water

quality improves with prescribed burning as well, since leaves and groundcover are burned away, allowing for rain to penetrate the ground rather than be runoff.

According to the Georgia Prescribed Fire Council website, "Frequent fires, set by lightning strikes and Native Americans, have shaped Georgia's ecosystems for thousands of years. Our forest systems evolved with fire and continues to need the strategic application of fire that mimics this natural cycle."

Prescribed fire managers conduct careful planning to minimize smoke impacts on public health and safety, including the consideration of weather conditions for optimal smoke dispersion.

That's not to say there won't be smoke in communities during controlled burns, but prescribed fires are conducted at times when they will have the least impact on surrounding areas.

Several websites may be accessed for more information on prescribed fire: www.garx-fire.com; www.GoodFires.org; www.appalachianfire.org; and www.frames.gov, just to name a few.

For information on protecting a residence against wildfire, contact the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council at 706-894-1591, or call the fire department for information on Firewise.