

# MENDOCINO COLLEGE FACULTY IN FOCUS: NICHOLAS PETTI

By Lynda Myers

Culinary Arts Management instructor, Nicholas Petti, began his teaching career at Mendocino College (MC) in fall 2011. However, he and his wife, Jaimi, have lived in Mendocino County since they moved to Fort Bragg in 1991. Owners of Mendo Bistro since 1999, with Nicholas as the chef and Jaimi as the general manager, the Petti's decided to change their lifestyle when they became parents. Jaimi moved home with their son, Marlon, while Nicholas moved into the general management position, and they promoted some of their long-term chefs to replace Nicholas in the kitchen.

"A chef's life is difficult with a school-aged child," says Petti, who is committed to being available to his son on weekends and holidays during his formative years.

Now that Marlon is in school, Jaimi plans to resume the position as general manager, while Nicholas will teach at MC. He plans to remain involved in Mendo Bistro, while also providing an opportunity for the current chefs to grow, both professionally and financially.

Born in Ohio, Petti lived all over the country as a child, mostly on the Eastern seaboard. His background includes training at the California Culinary Academy, and over 20 years experience as a chef and restaurant manager. He taught six-week cooking classes as a resort chef in Colorado, and he has also taught many culinary classes at Mendo Bistro.

Besides owning and managing a successful restaurant, and cooking, Petti has worked as an apartment manager, a vocational school admissions counselor, and a musician.

As the first full-time culinary arts manage-

ment faculty member, Petti considers his position "a fantastic opportunity to build a program." He is proud of the new culinary arts facility that was generously donated to MC by Madelyn and Dennis Yeo, in memory of Madelyn's parents, Frank and Roslyn Keller. Spacious and shining, with state-of-the-art equipment, Petti says it is much nicer than most culinary arts teaching facilities.

Petti notes that his program begins with instruction in safety and sanitation.

"A commercial kitchen is more like a welding or a machine shop than a home kitchen," he explains, "with lots of loud, hot things that can hurt you." He also emphasizes the importance of "addressing the different wants, needs, and time frames of every patron, and every plate."

Although the program focus will be on the restaurant world, Petti says the classes are also appropriate for family cooks who want to learn new cooking techniques and recipes.

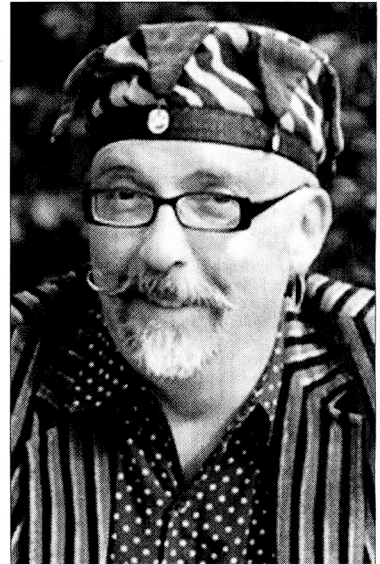
Petti looks forward to meeting food and wine producers in the area, with an eye to eventually having groups of MC culinary arts students available to cook for local events. He also hopes to have a student-run cafe on campus in the future.

He says while that "the coast" has been the culinary focus of the area, he hopes to capture the potential for moving that focus inland.

"It will take cooperation to make that happen," he says, "because people who come here for a dining experience, will also need interesting, developed, attractions to keep them here for a week, or a weekend."

Petti notes that both he and Jaimi have family in the area, and that Jaimi's father, Gene Parsons, was the first musical artist in resi-

dence at MC. Besides spending time with family, Petti enjoys playing his pedal steel guitar, and reading. As a hobby, he performs magic shows for children as Professor Niko Mumblemore.



Submitted photo

Nicholas Petti