

FOOD

# Time to get cooking with Chef Aaron

Celebrity chef debuts new menu at his Adobo Cantina in Evansdale residential complex

BY JIM BISSETT

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The celebrity chef lived up to his billing Tuesday at WVU's Cafe Evansdale.

"Can we get a selfie?" students Sophia Schnore and Ava McSparin asked, as they dropped in for lunch in-between classes.

"Of course you can," Chef Aaron Sanchez said as he drew in for the photograph.

"Let me know what you think of the food."

Sanchez, who has starred in multiple shows on the Food Network and is currently a judge on the culinary-com-

petition series "MasterChef" and "MasterChef Junior" was in town to see how his Adobo Cantina, which is housed in the cafe, was doing in its third year of operation.

He created it in partnership with Sodexo, the food service giant also aligned with WVU. He did the same for another college in Texas.

"I love coming here," he said. "This is my third visit. That makes me an honorary West Virginian."

The chef was on the Evansdale campus to showcase new menu offerings of jalapeno brisket, fajita chicken, tres

leches cake and tomato rice and charro beans.

"And we've expanded the taco bar, too," he said. "Can't go wrong with that."

In today's angst-filled times, he said, there's nothing like down at a table heaping with good food and good conversation.

"Put the phones away," he said. "You're breaking bread. You're part of a community."

It didn't take Sanchez long to become part of the restaurant community in New York City. That's where his mother Zarela Martinez, who was raising Aaron and his twin brother Rodrigo – and she worked an internship in the New Orleans restaurant of Paul Prudhomme, another celebrity chef.

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Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

New WVU President Mike Benson, left, stopped to chat with Chef Aaron Sanchez at the Bennet Towers cafeteria Tuesday.

# Nourish Yourself: Neapolitan meatballs



AP photo

A classic Italian dinner item, this take on meatballs channels the cuisine of Naples. By using Japanese style Panko breadcrumbs, the process of putting the meal together is significantly streamlined while still producing a delicious, tender meatball.

## This streamlined meal is made with panko breadcrumbs

Associated Press

Naples may be famous for its pizza, but the meatballs are just as deserving of worldwide acclaim. Massive orbs of ground beef are set in a shallow pool of ragù, red and glistening, and are served as often alongside pasta as without. Despite their impressive size, they're light and ultra-tender, thanks to a high ratio of bread to meat.

In this recipe from our latest cookbook, "Milk Street Backroads Italy," we use Japanese panko breadcrumbs, which have a neutral flavor and a light and fluffy but coarse texture. It greatly streamlines the meatball-making process, eliminating the need to remove the crusts from fresh bread, soak it in water and

squeeze out excess moisture. Panko only needs to be moistened with water and it's ready to use.

Don't be shy about mixing the panko-meat mixture with your hands. It takes a few minutes to work the mixture together until homogeneous. To help the meatballs keep their shape, chill them for 15 to 20 minutes before baking.

Neapolitans serve their meatballs with a basic tomato sauce they refer to as "ragù." After baking, be sure to let the meatballs rest for about 10 minutes before adding them to the sauce. Pecorino is used two ways in this recipe. A chunk is simmered in the sauce, and a portion is grated both in and over the meatballs.

Serve with warm, crusty bread or pasta alongside. Though the latter isn't traditional, it makes a fine accompaniment.

### Neapolitan meatballs

*Start to finish: 50 minutes Servings: 6 to 8*

**Ingredients:** 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided, plus more to serve 1 large yellow onion, finely chopped

Kosher salt and ground black pepper

6 medium garlic cloves, finely grated

1½ teaspoons red pepper flakes, divided

6½ ounces (2½ cups) panko breadcrumbs

3 ounces pecorino Romano

cheese, 2 ounces finely grated (1 cup), 1 ounce as a chunk, plus more grated, to serve

1 large egg, plus 1 large egg yolk, beaten together

1½ pounds 90 percent lean ground beef

Two 28-ounce cans whole peeled tomatoes

6 to 8 large basil leaves

Heat the oven to 475°F with a rack in the middle position. Line a rimmed baking sheet with kitchen parchment and mist with cooking spray. In a large Dutch oven over medium-high, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil until shimmering. Add the onion and ¼ teaspoon salt, then cook, stir-

SEE NOURISH, A-6



EVA MURPHY

## Playa Bowls: where healthy eats taste like a treat

Acai bowls have gained popularity as a refreshing and nutrient-dense alternative to more traditional frozen desserts. The foundation of these treats is a sweetened frozen puree of acai, a dark purple fruit native to the Amazon rainforest. I recently tried an Acai bowl for the first time, and it put me in mind of a blueberry sorbet with a slightly earthier flavor. Acai is rich in anthocyanins, a compound that the National Institutes of Health identify as having anti-inflammatory properties. Toppings of sliced fruit, granola, nut butter and chocolate drizzles turn one of these bowls into something akin to an ice cream sundae. If you are going to treat yourself, it might as well be something that satisfies your sweet tooth while also giving a kick of fiber and antioxidants that most other desserts can't provide.

Playa Bowls, a smoothie and juice bar franchise focusing on acai bowls, recently opened its first West Virginia location in Morgantown's Suncrest Towne Centre on Feb. 1. The shop operates from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily. The acai bowls are a popular choice, but the menu also includes similar concoctions made from pitaya (dragon fruit), coconut, banana and kale bases.

The Playa Bowls brand values giving back to communities. In 2022, the franchise hosted a food drive and in-store donation options for the

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POLICE

# Driver arrested after high-speed chase in Preston County

DPNews@DominionPost.com

TUNNELTON – Preston County sheriff's deputies arrested a man following a high-speed chase March 23.

According to a criminal complaint, a deputy received a notice from Marion County that a man with a shotgun may be traveling in the area of a female acquaintance. A relative of the acquaintance claimed the driver was armed.

At 10:49 p.m. March 23, the deputy reported spot-

ting a vehicle matching the description in the lookout notice traveling at a high rate of speed. The driver allegedly evaded a traffic stop, ran stop signs and fled at speeds up to 60 mph, the complaint states.

The deputy stated that the vehicle stopped near the residence of the female acquaintance and several items were thrown from the vehicle. The driver then sped away at 90 mph on South Preston Highway.

At George Washington

Highway south of Tunnelton, deputies deployed a spike device that caused the vehicle's tires to deflate and forced it to stop.

Deputies took Austin Robinson, 18, of Fairmont into custody at gunpoint, the complaint states. A Stevens Model 320 20-gauge shotgun was recovered from the vehicle. Robinson was processed and transported to Tygart Valley Regional Jail for arraignment on a charge of fleeing with reckless indifference.

# Man sentenced for role in drug trafficking operation

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CLARKSBURG – Rodney Johnson, 48, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was sentenced today to 188 months in federal prison for his leadership of a drug trafficking organization that sold large amounts of methamphetamine, fentanyl and cocaine in North Central West Virginia.

According to court documents, Johnson recruited others to distribute in Morgantown, paying the distributors a salary to transport and sell the drugs. He supplied significant quantities of illicit drugs to be sold.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Zelda Wesley prosecuted the cases on behalf of the government.

This case was investigated by the Mon Metro Drug Task Force, a HID-TA-funded initiative. The task force consists of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; the Drug Enforcement Administration; the West Virginia State Police; the Monongalia County Sheriff's Office; the Monongalia County Prosecuting Attorney's Office; the Morgantown Police Department; the WVU Police Department;

the Granville Police Department; and the Star City Police Department.

This effort is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) operation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level criminal organizations that threaten the United States using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach. Additional information about the OCDETF Program can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/OCDETF>.

Chief U.S. District Judge Thomas S. Kleeh presided.



New WVU President Mike Benson chats with students Tuesday at Bennett Towers.

Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

## AARON

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Learning from Prudhomme gave her the confidence to launch her own restaurant, which Aaron quickly took to, he said.

"I knew I wanted to be a chef from the time I was 16 years old," he said.

Sanchez, who now runs his successful Johnny Sanchez restaurant in the Crescent City, made his name on the Food

Network, when the cable enterprise was still being brought to a pop-culture boil.

During one memorable Thanksgiving episode, he cooked a turkey dinner with all the trimmings in his kitchen, then hailed a cab for an uptown haul – complete with oven mitts and the entire dinner on his lap – to the cable channel's studios, which didn't have a kitchen of its own at the time.

"You have to be re-

sourceful," he said. "Really, the food has to taste good."

No complaints from Sophia and Ava, who loved the fajita chicken and tres leches cake.

"We're out here every day," Ava said.

When Sophia goes home for the holidays, she anchors down in the family kitchen with her dad, who always cooks.

"We're always trying recipes," she said. "And watching Chef Aaron."

## MURPHY

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Thanksgiving holiday, raising over \$20,000 and collecting over 1,000 pounds of food. The Morgantown location has

announced a "Dine to Donate" initiative, where participating organizations like schools and sports teams can receive a portion of the proceeds from customers who mention their affiliation at checkout. Organi-

zations interested in holding a fundraiser can contact the store through Instagram ([https://www.instagram.com/playabowls\\_morgantown](https://www.instagram.com/playabowls_morgantown)) or submit a request through the Playa Bowls website.

HEALTH

# WVU Medicine providers ride in support of blood cancer patients

WVUMedicine.org

WVU Medicine is going the extra mile – or extra 100 miles – through the mountains in support of blood cancer patients and their families. Providers from the WVU Cancer Institute, WVU Medicine Children's, and WVU Medicine Wheeling Hospital will team up to take part in the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's (LLS) America's Most Beautiful Bike Ride on June 1 along Lake Tahoe in Stateline, Nevada.

America's Most Beautiful Bike Ride, now in its 32nd year, is a fundraising event that takes cyclists on a challenging 35-, 72- or 100-mile ride around scenic Lake Tahoe. The event supports the LLS, a non-profit organization dedicated to funding blood cancer research and providing education, resources, and financial support to patients. WVU Medicine and WVU Medicine Children's are sponsors for the event. Close to home, the LLS provided \$1,054,500 in assistance to West Virginia blood cancer patients and caregivers during its 2024 fiscal year.

Ashkan Emadi, M.D., Ph.D., chair of the WVU Cancer Institute Department of Medical Oncology, is captain of the WVU Medicine team, "Mountain to Mountain: Crossing the Country for a Cure."

While in attendance at last year's event, Dr. Emadi witnessed more than 2,000 riders cross the

finish line – some rode 100 miles on hand bikes, while others tackled the course only 100 days after their final chemotherapy treatment. This was more than enough inspiration for Emadi, who decided to not only sponsor the event but to also form a team and ride in it.

"As a physician and scientist dedicated to treating blood cancers, I see firsthand the impact these diseases have on patients and their families," Emadi said.

Emadi will be joined by Konstantinos Sdrimas, M.D., Department of Medical Oncology; Carl Shultz, D.O., Department of Medical Oncology, and his wife, Beth; Samantha Hall, N.P., A.P.R.N., WVU Cancer Institute; Amy Romano, WVU Cancer Institute marketing and communications manager; Patrick Tomboc, D.O., division chief, Pediatric Hematology and Oncology, WVU Medicine Children's; and Rob Riley, division manager in the WVU Medicine Children's Department of Pediatrics.

Also attending the event but not riding with the team is Bhavana Bhatnagar, D.O., director of the Department of Medical Oncology at the WVU Cancer Institute at Wheeling Hospital. The team is training with spinning instructor Keri Schmidt, the wife of Carl Schmidt, M.D., chief, Division of Surgical Oncology.

"When someone finds out that I take care of kids with cancer, there's

an audible sigh and then they say, "That must be so hard," Dr. Tomboc said. "My job is not nearly as hard, painful, or stressful as being diagnosed with cancer or having a child with cancer. This ride is a small bit of suffering to hopefully raise money so my patients can have a future."

During the event, WVU Medicine participants will highlight a pediatric patient, speak on various topics, and present on thought leader panels. Emadi plans to drive to the event, and on his way across the country, he intends to meet and collaborate with colleagues at various stopping points to showcase the programs at WVU Medicine.

"Mountain to Mountain: Crossing the Country for a Cure" has set an event fundraising goal of \$100,000. Donations can be made to the team at <https://pages.lls.org/tnt/wpa/ambbr25/Mountain-to-MountainCrossingtheCountryforACure>.

"Participating in LLS's America's Most Beautiful Bike Ride is more than a challenge – it's a commitment to pushing forward in the fight against leukemia, lymphoma, myeloma, and other blood cancers," Emadi said. "Every mile we ride fuels research, advances treatments, and brings hope to those battling blood cancers. I ride not just as a doctor, but as a human who believes we can – and must – do more to save lives."



Courtesy of WVU Medicine

Members of the team "Mountain to Mountain: Crossing the Country for a Cure" practice for their upcoming participation in America's Most Beautiful Bike Ride on June 1. Pictured from left are Dr. Patrick Tomboc, Dr. Konstantinos Sdrimas, trainer Keri Schmidt, Dr. Ashkan Emadi, Samantha Hall, Dr. Carl Shultz, Beth Shultz, Rob Riley and Amy Romano.

## NOURISH

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stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and 1 teaspoon of the pepper flakes; cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Remove from the heat, then transfer half of the onion mixture to a large bowl.

In a medium bowl, combine the panko and 1 1/4 cups water; press the panko into the water and let stand until fully softened, about 5 minutes.

Mash with your hands to a smooth paste, then add to the bowl with the onion mixture. Using a fork, mix until well combined and smooth. Stir in the grated cheese, beaten eggs, remaining 2 tablespoons oil, 3/4 teaspoon salt and 2 teaspoons black pepper. Add the meat and mix with your hands until completely homogeneous.

Using a 1/2-cup dry measuring cup, divide the mixture into 8 portions. Using your hands, shape each into a compact ball and place on the prepared baking sheet, spacing them

evenly apart. Refrigerate uncovered for 15 to 20 minutes. Re-shape the meatballs if they have flattened slightly, then bake until lightly browned, about 20 minutes. Let cool on the baking sheet set on a wire rack for about 10 minutes.

While the meatballs cook, in a food processor or blender, puree the tomatoes with their juices one can at a time, until smooth, about 30 seconds, transferring the puree to a large bowl. Return the Dutch oven to medium and heat the remaining onion mixture, stirring, until warmed through, about 2 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes, remaining 1/2 teaspoon pepper flakes, the basil and the chunk of cheese. Bring to a simmer over medium-high and cook, stirring occasionally, until slightly thickened, about 15 minutes. Taste and season with salt and pepper.

Using a large spoon, carefully transfer the meatballs to the sauce, then, using 2 spoons, turn each to coat. Bring to a gentle simmer, then reduce to medium-low, cover and cook for 5 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat and let stand, covered, for about 5 minutes to allow the meatballs to firm up slightly. Remove and discard the pecorino chunk. Serve with additional grated cheese.



**Monongalia County Solid Waste Authority**

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