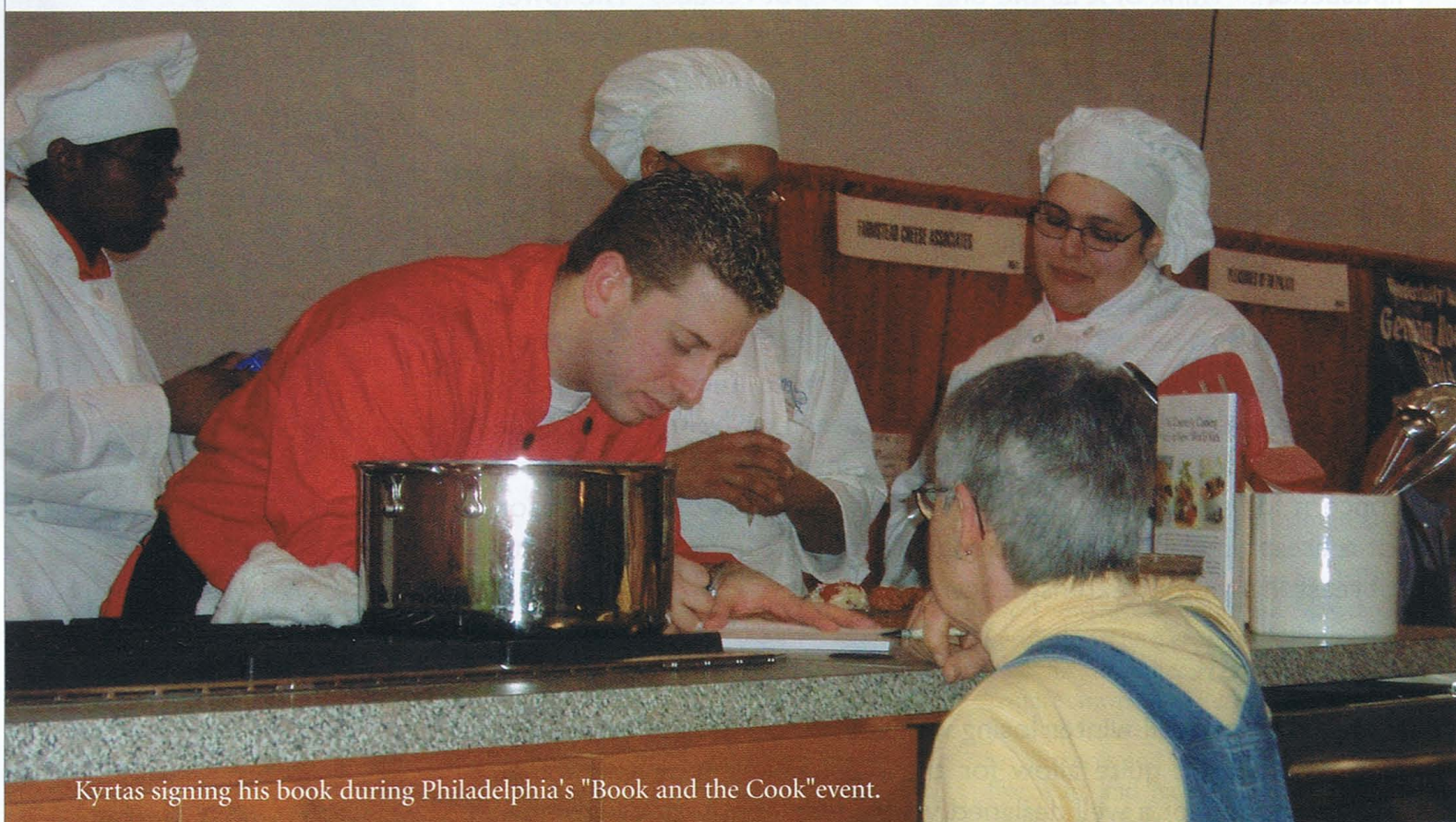


by Carole Murry

# Fame and Family

George Kyrtatas blends a dose of celebrity chef with a heaping portion of family.



Kyrtas signing his book during Philadelphia's "Book and the Cook" event.

**S**tart with a generous helping of culinary expertise, add the perfect blend of confidence and humility, and finish off with a generous amount of family support. The results are the varied achievements of George Kyrtatas, twenty-six-year-old restaurateur and author of the cookbook *My Big Fat Greek Feast*.

Kyrtatas, the youngest ever Certified Chef de Cuisine at the American Culinary Federation (ACF), released his book in time for the Athens Olympics in 2004. Its success has taken the young chef from an unassuming yet demanding existence as co-owner of Hathaway's restaurant in Cinnaminson to semi-celebrity status. He has prepped for Emeril's live taping in Philadelphia, worked

with Martin Yang at an ACF Conference and cooked with Mario Batali during Philadelphia's "The Book and the Cook" event.

*My Big Fat Greek Feast* published by Small Potatoes Press is available at Barnes and Noble, Borders, [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) and at Hathaway's Restaurant. The book has been well received for its cross section of Greek recipes and its interesting sidebars that

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explain the origin and history of Greek cooking. Featured is a comprehensive herb substitution chart that teaches users to reach for ginger when cardamom is unavailable or to try flat leaf parsley if cilantro is not a favorite.

"A lot of times when people are cooking they'll come upon an ingredient that they don't like, or that they don't have," says Kyrtatas, a resident of Hainesport. "They'll avoid the entire recipe. I think they're missing out."

The chart, a compilation of Kyrtatas creativity and years of experience, encourages boldness in the kitchen and makes it easy for those who want to overcome the inhibitions that commonly hold some cooks back. "Too many people are intimidated when they cook," Kyrtatas explains, "especially with Greek cooking because some of the ingredients may be unfamiliar."

Kyrtatas believes it is the apprehension surrounding unfamiliar ingredients that caused one critic to claim that some of his

recipes are not for beginners. "I strongly disagree with the statement," says Kyrtatas in defense of his book.

He claims that *My Big Fat Greek Feast* is easy to use, "Nothing in the book is difficult to work with. Just a little different than what some people may be used to."

Kyrtatas thinks the ingredients associated with Mediterranean food preparation may soon become as common as ketchup. "With the popularity of Mediterranean cuisine on the rise, the leading producers of these foods have made ingredients like filo dough and calamari more accessible and easier to work with than ever," says Kyrtatas. "Interest in Mediterranean food preparation is growing. Today most Mediterranean ingredients are available in any grocery store."

Kyrtatas plans to capitalize on the emergent trend with a second book that will focus more broadly on the region. No doubt he will rely on the unwavering support of his family that was so vital to the

success of his first book.

From mom and dad who purchased Hathaway's as a young married couple, to brother and business partner John whose resolute presence at the restaurant enables Kyrtatas the freedom to make public appearances, to the daily sacrifices willingly offered by wife Frances and daughter Katerina, the Kyrtatas family is a network of devotion to one another. Kyrtatas counts the support that he receives from the people he loves as the major contributing factor to his achievements.

"Family is first," he says with unmistakable sincerity. "I'd rather have nothing at all and a strong family than achieve success and have rocky relationships."

Kyrtatas learned from the example set by his parents Evangelos and Antonia. They worked 120-hour weeks side by side yet believed whole-heartedly in the importance of spending their days off together as well. Now Kyrtatas does the same with his wife, although Frances does not work in the restaurant. Kyrtatas spends all of his free time with her and their fourteen-month-old daughter Katerina. "When I am home I spend as much time with my wife and daughter as I can. My days off are devoted entirely to them," he says.

His strong convictions put into action have enabled Kyrtatas to receive public attention without putting a strain on his private life, yet his commitment to family may come at what some would call a cost to his career. While he has the skills and the knowledge to achieve a Master Chef certification he has decided to put off that goal for now because doing so would require travel away from his wife and young daughter.

"Frances and I have been married for five years and haven't yet spent a night away from each other," he says. Kyrtatas doesn't see postponing the certification as a personal sacrifice.

Dedication to the people that are closest to him has always been a way of life for Kyrtatas. He remembers as a boy times when, instead of going home after school, he and John would spend their afternoons chopping vegetables and peeling potatoes at the restaurant. Nevertheless, his parents discouraged the young boys from following in their footsteps.

"Because of the demands of the business they wanted us to pursue something different," he says. Yet both sons caught the bug and have managed, like their parents, before them to handle the pressures of a taxing career while securing the ties that matter most. "We do what we do for the entire family. It is something that will supply a good future for all of us," he adds. ❖