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Former 'Survivor' cast member speaks to OU class

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

When Visiting Assistant Professor of Communication Wendy Robinson assigned her Multicultural Communication (COM 385) class to collect recipes from their elderly relatives for a multicultural cookbook, she sought a guest speaker to complement the assignment. What better ingredient could she have selected than a restaurateur, chef, world traveler, author and TV personality?

Keith Famie, a well-known celebrity chef based in Novi and former owner of several nationally recognized restaurants in Birmingham, Mich., spoke to Robinson's class of the cuisine he's sampled from many cultures across the globe as well as his various TV appearances, including the second "Survivor" TV series, which was based in Australia. The class visit, which took place at Meadow Brook Hall on Nov. 19, supplemented regular classroom curriculum focusing on the meanings of culture and subculture.

"The first thing I notice when I visit a new culture is the food," said Famie, who has visited locales as distant as Africa and Asia and worked in hotels in Brussels, Monte Carlo and New York. "I always visit the local market, because you can learn a lot about the culture by the things they eat. My passport to the world of adventure has been cooking."

The students, who contributed such recipes as "Esther's Fannaguggles" (Austrian potato pancakes) and Grandma Stella's Golbaki (stuffed cabbage) to their class cookbook, asked Famie many questions about his travels and experiences working on television.

"I was very interested in how Famie brings together aspects he likes about many different cultures into things like his TV shows and cookbooks," said senior communications major April Ray. "It's very much the way we're looking at the class. It's a very diverse class with students of different ethnicities and social backgrounds. But we pay attention to each person and each culture. We know that there's something to take from each person, and we can learn from each other."

Among the "travel adventures" Famie spoke of was a recent TV documentary he made in Vietnam, in which he accompanied three Vietnam War veterans back to that country for their first visit since the war.

"None of them had been back since leaving the battlefield," Famie said. "And they each talked about the culture and their feelings of forgiveness. To see those men embrace the country and its people was amazing."

During that same trip, Famie encountered a different kind of cuisine in the local marketplace that he had yet to experience.

"For thousands of years, the Vietnamese have eaten dog," Famie said. "The people do keep dogs as pets, but there is also another type of dog they breed and raise strictly for eating. This was something about the culture that I didn't realize before visiting. It's also just about one of the worst things I've eaten. It's up there with cow brains."

Famie also spoke a great deal about his time as a cast member of "Survivor," and the sometimes difficult social relationships created by the artificially created culture for the show.

"Once you're out there (the Australian Outback) it's hard to perceive the show as a game – it becomes more a way of life," Famie said. "You lose all contact with your loved ones and your regular life. It's almost like a boot camp situation."

"The show is like an experimental microcosm of society. The producers pick a diverse group of people across all ages, put them together and see how it unravels. The scientists are the producers, the rats are the cast members."

Another topic Famie touched on was his charitable efforts as president of the Rainbow Connection, a nonprofit organization that grants wishes for children with life threatening illnesses in Michigan. One of his related projects as head of his own TV production company was to make a documentary, yet to air, titled "The Calling."

"How often in life do we hear of people who have an inner voice that tells them to walk away from our present lives and pursue our calling?" Famie asked. "An 87-year-old man came out of retirement to create 'Camp Make a Dream' in Montana for very

young, sometimes terminally ill, cancer patients.

“Life isn’t about the destination, it’s about the journey. You never really get to your destination because you’re always going. To dream is to fantasize, but to visualize is to succeed. I encourage all of you to be relentless in visualizing what you want, and don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t achieve it.”

Robinson said Famie’s talk contributed to the class on several levels.

“The class has been emphasizing issues dealing with diversity, racism and other weighty issues that accompany the meeting of different cultures,” Robinson said. “I think Famie provided a way of looking at the same issues and showing that you can have fun with it. There are also mostly communication majors in the class, and it was interesting for them to be able to speak to him about his appearance on ‘Survivor’ and his other TV appearances and production company. I think this was useful to them in a practical way.”

Famie currently can be seen on “**Keith Famie’s Adventures**,” featuring his global travels and exotic cuisine, on the Food Network. For more information, visit [Keith Famie’s Adventures on the Web](#).

SUMMARY

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