



Steve Biery

Class of 1986

AREA CHEF TO SERVE OLYMPIAN ATHLETES AT SUMMER OLYMPICS 2008

STAUNTON, Virginia — Steve Biery was only 15 years old when he first stepped into the kitchen of Almas, an Italian restaurant his best friend's family owned in Cocoa Beach, Fla. By 16 he was working on the line, and, after becoming one of the first students at the Florida Culinary Institute, graduating class of 1989, Biery knew he had found his niche in the kitchen.

"Since the first job in the restaurant, I just loved it," Biery said. "I just kept working in restaurants. I've worked in almost every aspect of the restaurant industry."



Biery's passion has taken him a long way from that restaurant in Cocoa Beach, Fla., and will continue to do so when he arrives in Beijing this July, prepared to cook for this summer's Olympic Games. He will be working as a sous chef, in charge of one of the facilities in the Olympic Media Village.

"I just thought it would be a great experience to learn a new culture and hopefully pick up new authentic cooking techniques from over there," Biery said.

Biery lives in Staunton but works for Aramark as executive chef for the University of Virginia, where he oversees a staff of about 100 and his kitchen puts out nearly 5,000 meals each day. Aramark will serve as the caterer for the Olympic Games this year, making it the 14th year the company has done so.

"I still have a passion for cooking and creating," Biery said. "I still get excited when I have an order of 200 pounds of shrimp come in, or during exam week at U.Va., as an exam break we did chicken wings, and we had 32 40-pound cases of chicken wings come in. We ran out before the night was over."

Biery likes working with large quantities of ingredients, figuring out how to maintain the quality of the dishes in the face of such an overwhelming amount of food.

"I have to figure out how to do it," he said. "How to receive that much food, and prepare that much food so it's done correctly and safely — and *tasty*. There's a lot of planning involved for such large quantities."

He'll be at home in Beijing then, where more than 3.5 million meals will be served to more than 60,000 guests, including athletes, coaches, officials and media members during the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

"I think that's the main reason they picked me," Biery said.

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"As it's getting closer, they're getting more antsy," he says. "But we've started counting down the days."

Biery hopes his experience in China will broaden his culinary perspective, too.

"I'm going to be working with a lot of Chinese people, since most of the labor force will be from over there," he says. "I'm hoping to become friends and share recipes and trade cultures and to learn anything I can learn from them."



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Biery, executive chef at Observatory Hill Dining Hall, will manage a food tent at the Olympics this summer in Beijing for ARAMARK, which has a food service contract at the games. ARAMARK provides food service to the University of Virginia.

"I'm pretty excited and am still trying to take it all in," Biery said. "I like being in a foreign country and absorbing the culture."

In China, Biery will be a sous chef, running one of the many tents set up to feed members of the international media. His tent will serve breakfast, lunch and dinner and operate 24 hours a day. He said ARAMARK will have about 7,000 managers, chefs, cooks and other employees at the Olympics to serve about 3.5 million meals. Biery will be in Beijing for the duration of the games, from July 6 to Aug. 30.

Biery said he applied to go to the Olympics as soon as he heard about the opportunity. He has experience in catering at large events, such as the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Jamestown's founding, but nothing to compare to the size of the Olympics. He received an e-mail from a friend who is already working there and was advised to "be ready from the first day, mentally and physically. This a lot of work."

A chef by "trade and passion," Biery wants to explore Chinese cuisine by observing and working with local chefs, including those working for ARAMARK during the games.

In his downtime, Biery wants to sample local cooking, visit open-air food markets and seek out new things.

"I want to learn the tricks of the trade that we don't do here," he said. "I've cooked with a wok before, but I would love to stand next to someone over there and watch their technique."

Chinese food is a passion for Biery. He is always in search of the perfect hot and sour soup. He's eager to learn how the Chinese work with sauces. And there is a recipe that he wants.

"I would love to see their version of General Tso's Chicken," he said, noting the wide variations of the dish in the U.S. "I will probably find that it's a regional thing."

"I want to learn some new trends and techniques in cooking," he said. "I want to see it done by people who really know what they are doing. After we build a rapport, then we can trade recipes."

He also hopes his Chinese hosts are as interested to learn from him as he is to learn from them.

Biery said he will be particularly on the lookout for ideas for the Observatory Hill Dining Hall's popular Innovation Station, where about 90 percent of the entrees are stir-fried.

He enjoys working at "O-Hill" because it gives him an opportunity to know many of the students, some of whom are very vocal about their culinary likes and dislikes. One of those students with whom he has built a relationship lives in Beijing and wants to guide him around the city while he is there.

Biery, 40, has been working with and around food since he was a Florida teenager and left the family trade of construction to work in an Italian restaurant.

He enrolled in a hotel and restaurant management program in college, but realized that he was drawn to the kitchen and transferred to the Florida Culinary Institute in West Palm Beach, where he was a member of its first graduating class in 1989. He stayed in Florida for 10 years, working at everything from a hospital to a four-diamond resort.

Eight years ago he started working at colleges and three years ago he joined ARAMARK at U.Va. He enjoys cooking in higher education because it gives him more time with his wife and two children.

While his wife does most of the cooking at home, Biery uses his family to try his new recipes. When he experiments with food, his children are his guinea pigs and his severest critics.

"Children have no problems telling you what they think of something," he said.