

## TRAVEL

# Chef Keith Famie finds a rich culture in Vietnam

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In a small screening room at WDVV-TV, Channel 4, Birmingham chef Keith Famie agonized over how he would condense 24 hours of video from Vietnam into one hourlong program and six short cooking segments.

The material was just too good, full of too many memorable moments to be pared into such small segments.

As part of Famie's Adventures in Cooking, the chef had accompanied several veterans of the Vietnam War back to the Southeast Asian country for a bicycle tour. The cooking segments are running now and the hourlong special is scheduled for Monday, Aug. 30, time to be determined.

Famie had gone to numerous locations for his cooking show (shown at noon Fridays and 8 a.m. Saturdays). In January he showed a program he did in Hawaii where he took three special children from the Rainbow Connection, an organization for which he is vice president.

He's proud of that show, but Vietnam was different. In Vietnam he wanted to change perceptions about the country and its people.

"I was 8 years old when the Vietnam war was going on. You guys hear about it as a war, this will change that," he said.

The Vietnam trip was sponsored by General Motors. The outfitters Cycle the World arranged the bicycle journey, moving south from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). The show is planned for prime time broadcast.

Famie bicycled about half way, riding with three war veterans, Tom Morgan of Hartland, Mich., Tom Rampton of Colorado and Dr. Peter McGuire of Maine.

"It's easy to see how soldiers at such a young age, dropped into an environment they have no concept about, can create a camaraderie," Famie said.

Sensitive to possibly offending veterans, Famie spent time before the trip at the Veterans Association in Detroit, meeting with veterans and trying to understand their point of view.

"In taking time with the vets, I didn't talk to one who didn't say they didn't want to go back. They thought it was a beautiful country. It's amazing how many go back," Famie said.

He also found that many veterans, while respecting the job they and their comrades did, have reservations about the war itself and a lasting respect for the tenacity of their opponents.

"I was a kid and have no right to say yes or no, but they (veterans) talked with all any we had not right to be there. They have a respect for the Viet soldiers and it's interesting to see them together," Famie said.

"Tom Morgan told Famie that he didn't want to come back to relive the war but to experience the culture, the people and food that he didn't experience while he was a soldier.

In one of the most interesting segments, sure to make the final edit, Morgan meets with a Vietnamese veteran of the war, and still a soldier. They share a strange "tea" and discuss their memories of being enemies.

"This just exceeded all my visions of what should be in this show," Famie said as he ran the footage of Morgan and his new found friend.

But in addition to healing the wounds of war, Famie and his cameraman, Kevin Hewitt of Livonia, have gotten an up-close-and-personal view of the Vietnamese people and their daily lives.

"My reason for going was simple," Famie said. "The place was culturally interesting to me in terms of food, people, history."

To get a close view of the people, Famie and Hewitt hired two cyclos driven by brothers. Cyclos are three-wheeled cycles with a front carriage seat at street level. Hewitt's footage shows Famie enjoying the view as his driver maneuvers among bicycles, scooters, pedestrians and an occasional small car.

"The cyclo is the best means of transportation in Hanoi. You're down close to the traffic. These brothers were our drivers and we shot from those seats wherever they took us," Famie said.

They took them to open air markets, artists markets, a sidewalk barbershop, the Opera House, popular bars (Apocalypse Now and Spotted Cow) and back to their room at the five-star Metropole. The brothers also took their two new friends out to dinner at the kind of restaurant enjoyed by the Vietnamese.

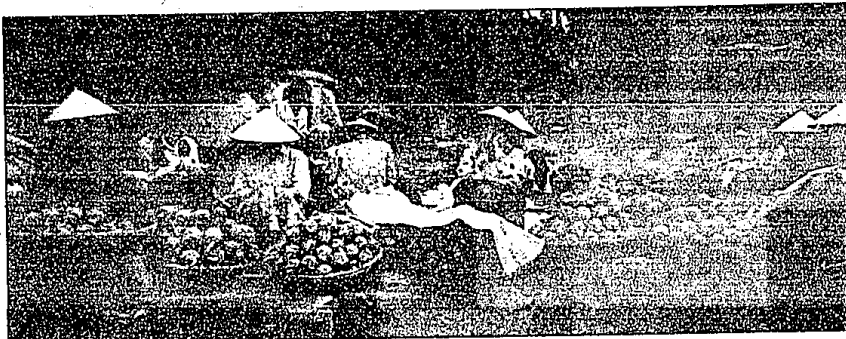
"If you befriend someone in a foreign country, have them take you someplace they usually go and it will be an experience," Famie said.

The Metropole's Chef Didier introduced Famie to some of Vietnam's more unusual culinary treats as they strolled an open air market including dragon fruit (a curious cross between kiwi and melon), snake fish, cod fish and thousands of cold eggs. One culinary item that Famie will not show is dog.

Another specialty of the country sat at Famie's feet as he showed the tapes, a large jug of snake wine with large, dead snakes curled at the bottom (said to be medicinal).

Vietnam cooking styles vary from place to place in the country.

"In the north, the food is influenced by the French. The French



Market place: Open air markets offer everything from snake fish and black eggs to fresh pineapples.



Cameraman: Kevin Hewitt, of Livonia, was able to capture many aspects of Vietnamese life, including this rice paddy, for Keith Famie's documentary.



Joining the crowd: Keith Famie rides along with a group of Vietnamese women off to market on their bicycles. Bicycles are a major mode of transportation in the country.

were here from the mid 1800s to the 1950s and you often see people with baguettes," Famie said. "They use herbs, vegetables, stocks, lake and river type seafood. In the south, the style is spicier and they rely on ocean seafood."

In the countryside, Famie and the veterans encountered a different kind of Vietnam as they pedaled 70-80 miles a day. Famie was outfitted with a

hybrid bike from Bikeport in Dearborn, which he said provided a comfortable ride. It was here in the countryside where Morgan met the war veteran, where the group stopped to visit a holy shrine and where Famie tried his hand at planting rice with an attractive young farm girl.

In one rural town, Famie and Hewitt were greeted like celebrities at a government school, the children exchanging high-fives

and delightful giggles with the Americans, mugging for the camera and generally being happy.

Famie said he is planning to hold a benefit dinner prior to the broadcast of his special that will benefit Rainbow Connection, Vietnam veterans and help create a computer link between the school in Vietnam and a school in Detroit through ICAN (The International Children's Alliance Network).

Famie's cooking adventures have taken him to the mesquite of New Mexico, scuba diving in Hawaii, barbecuing underneath Mount Rushmore and trading recipes in Shanghai, but this adventure was an emotional experience for him and his fellow riders.

"I miss being there and would go back in a minute," Famie said.



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