

Local Restaurateur Takes Big Idea to the Small Screen

by Ian Perrotta

Some people have hobbies, but Adrian Tonon is not one of them. Instead, he has a passion – helping others.

In between running the highly successful Café Cortina restaurant and raising four children, for the past two years Tonon has been realizing his dream of making a positive difference through the production of The Adrian Tonon Project. The series follows Tonon as he helps non-profit organizations overcome various obstacles and difficulties.

“Each episode creates awareness of a cause,” says Tonon. “It’s more philanthrotainment. It’s philanthropic, but first and foremost, it’s entertaining; philanthropy will follow suit. We’re not trying to preach or push something on it, but we want people to realize they can help too.”

The idea behind the ATP is simple: find a worthwhile non-profit that is having some sort of difficulty, determine what the cause is and fix it. The series started after funding dried up for Tonon’s last television series, Culture Café. However, recognizing the ability of the small screen to sway people’s opinions, Tonon decided he would continue to produce content.



Though he had previously had opportunities to host shows on cable networks like Bravo, Tonon had always passed them up to do it on his own terms. For him, it wasn’t about being a star on television – it was about making a difference. He set off with the mission to do so, and after a few episodes the results are palpable.

In one, Tonon works with Orchards Children’s Services, an organization that provides specialized care and recreational and educational services for children in Oakland, Wayne, and Macomb counties. Since he is a board member of the organization, Tonon had a special interest in fulfilling this extension of his project.

As part of the mission he helped institute a campaign called Food First, which is a program that helps educate children about the importance of good nutrition and healthy habits. Accompanying the kids on trips to grocery stores, Tonon helped show them the foods they should be eating and explained why.



photo by Scott Sprague



“A lot of these kids are very knowledgeable,” he says. “What I’m finding out is that they’re eating what’s convenient to them – they might rather eat healthy foods in some cases, but if that food isn’t available then they can’t.”

The episode also focused on a healthy overhaul of the adoption process for foster families, spotlighting the work being done to preserve families and prevent them from being split up. All-in-all, through the Adrian Tonon Project, several positive steps were taken by the organization.

Even though the series has yet to air, the results can already be felt. At Orchards Children’s Services, the main food facilities were overhauled and they’ve begun working closely with Beaumont Hospital’s head nutritionist to ensure families looking to buy healthy food on a limited budget can do so. There is also an effort underway to bring fresh produce to inner-city corner stores, and more recently, the production’s attention has been focused on revitalizing the oft-neglected city of Pontiac.

So far, there are several episodes already in the can, but whether or not the series will be picked up still remains in question. One thing is certain, however – no matter what the outcome, Tonon will continue pursuing his passion of making a positive difference in other people’s lives.

“I’m just following my passion and my dream,” he says. “I’ve kind of wrote off where it’s going, and what it’s going to be – it’s just something I have to do.”

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www.adriantononproject.com

