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## Alexander Lupinetti; famed for barbecue

By Claudia Vargas

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Alexander "Butch" Lupinetti, 69, of Mount Laurel, a South Jersey barbecue legend who competed nationally for 20 years, racking up more than 600 awards and beating celebrity chef Bobby Flay in a Food Network cook-off, died of a massive heart attack Wednesday, Aug. 4, while vacationing in Pompeii, Italy.

With an Italian father, Mr. Lupinetti grew up on pasta, tomato gravy, and meatballs. He would help his mother chop and peel vegetables, and his father prepare fresh meat.

The Lupinetti family lived on a Pemberton farm that raised chickens and hogs. It was the four boys' job to remove a hog's hair with corncobs before their father butchered and barbecued it, according to *Butch's Smack Your Lips BBQ Cookbook*, which Mr. Lupinetti coauthored in 2009.

"My daddy barbecued; that's just what you did on the farm, honey," Mr. Lupinetti told an Inquirer reporter in 2003.

As a young man, Mr. Lupinetti pursued singing. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he toured with a rock band and opened Butch's Place, a country-western bar turned rock-and-roll club in Pemberton.

But soon Mr. Lupinetti was roasting pigs out front and working on his own sauce.

In the late 1980s, he went to his first barbecue competition in Virginia and hooked up with a barbecue team from Arkansas. His passion took off.

Mr. Lupinetti built a traveling barbecue pit, which included a freezer, firebox, convection oven, and 10-foot rotisserie oven that could hold 600 pounds of meat. He hit the road with an entourage of helpers, including relatives and friends.

By 1990, he had launched Butch's Smack Your Lips Barbecue in Mount Laurel, a wholesale business of his sauces and rubs. Eight years later, he sold Butch's Place because of his frequent travels.

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A full-time competitor, Mr. Lupinetti participated in about two dozen barbecue contests each year in addition to television appearances, including a few on the Food Network.

In 2002, he won the New Jersey state barbecue championship, which qualified him to compete in the 2003 Jack Daniel's World Championship Invitational Barbecue in Lynchburg, Tenn., considered one of the most prestigious barbecue competitions.

He won second in the ribs contest and fourth overall, which fueled his desire for more competition.

"What else am I going to do? Put on one of those red vests and greet people at Wal-Mart? I don't think so. I love it," he said in a 2003 Inquirer article. "It's America. It really is. It is how things got started, the cowboys smoking meat and heating it over a fire on the range."

According to his website, Mr. Lupinetti was scheduled to compete in the Northwest Ohio Rib-Off this coming weekend, followed by other events across the country.

Mr. Lupinetti, an ironworker by trade, graduated from Rancocas Valley High School. He held various jobs, including work as a men's hairdresser, before purchasing the bar that became Butch's Place. He also owned Alexander's Sunset Inn in Browns Mills for nine years.

Mr. Lupinetti is survived by his wife, Lynne Balag; son Shane and daughter Alyson; his mother, Edith; and two brothers.

Visitation will be held from 6 to 9 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 12, and 9 a.m. to noon, Friday, Aug. 13, at Perinchief Chapels, 438 High St., Mount Holly. The funeral and interment will be private.

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