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— Mike Venturini,
Munro House

Joy of Cooking

Is there such a thing as too many cooks in the kitchen? Lori and Mike Venturini, owners of the Munro House Bed and Breakfast in Jonesville, don't think so. In fact, 14 cooks is what they normally host for their Chef Night private parties.

Guests come alone, as couples or with friends. "Everyone's divided into pairs, but their partner is not necessarily the person they came with," Lori says. "That way, they get to meet new people."

Donning aprons, each team is assigned two dishes to prepare for the seven-course meal. One lucky guest is crowned Head Chef, complete with the tall white hat. Lori does all the shopping ahead of time, making it easier for out-of-town guests.

"We never know just how the food is going to turn out," Lori says. "Sometimes, things don't turn out as expected, and that's OK." On these weekends, it's as much about what's cooking between friends and new acquaintances as it is about food.

The evening's format is informal. More accurately, it's minimally controlled chaos. Couples move from room to room, slicing, dicing, mincing, chopping, cutting, singing and dancing. And in the middle of it all, stirring it up, is Mike. Italian night comes complete with a red-and-white checked tablecloth, wax-laden candles in empty wine bottles and his spirited version of Dean Martin's *That's Amore*.

A menu of bruschetta, lentil soup, fresh greens with gorgonzola cheese and walnuts, veal saltimbocca alla romana and chicken Marsala comes together almost perfectly. Dessert is Italian apple cake and zabaglione—a warm Italian custard with Marsala wine.

After dinner, Lori shows off the 1834 Greek Revival-style mansion (below), including secret rooms and a tunnel, which was a stop for an estimated 400 slaves escaping on the Underground Railroad.

"This is not a professional cooking getaway," Mike stresses. "It's for amateurs who want to get into the kitchen, meet new friends and have a lot of fun!"

