

Cooking up 'Top Chef' competition

LI-raised contestant's culinary career includes starring in new season on Bravo

BY FRANK LOVECE
Special to Newsday

An immigrant raised in Central Islip is among the 15 contestants on the new season of "Top Chef," premiering Thursday at 8 p.m. on Bravo.

Byron Gomez, 32, who cooked at such world-class restaurants as Eleven Madison Park and Café Boulud before becoming an executive chef in Aspen, Colorado, says career success came "through drive, through determination, through dreaming deep and big. I was able to be around some of the best in the world in my field, to the point of getting the privilege of being on a show like "Top Chef" and competing with amazing people from across the country. So it just takes a little bit of dream and a lot of hard work."

Gomez, born in Costa Rica, uses the term "dream" in more than one sense. "I am a DACA recipient. I am a Dreamer," he says, using a term based on never-passed proposals in Congress called the DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) for immigrants brought to the United States as children, who under the Obama-era federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program can remain in the country and work while the government determines their status. Gomez, who arrived at age 8 with parents **Martha** and **Senen Gomez**, is currently in citizenship limbo. "There're a lot of people on Long Island, a lot of people in Central Islip, who can relate to that," he says.

Opponents of the DREAM Act say the law rewards people for breaking the law, encourages illegal immigration and hurts American workers.

The middle child between two sisters, he got his culinary start one summer at age 15, "in Ronkonkoma,

at a very famous restaurant called Burger King," he says impishly. "My second job was at TGI Fridays in Hauppauge," where he cooked at different stations on the line and "was a waiter for a little bit, because I wanted to get involved with everything that had to do with the restaurant world. And that's where it started," he says of his passion. "I started buying cookbooks. I started reading about chefs."

Later working at what was then the Sheraton (now Radisson) hotel on Motor Parkway in Hauppauge, the Central Islip Senior High School alumnus "started fantasizing. Me and a line cook, we used to talk about, 'Oh my God, I wish I could be in **Mario Batali's** kitchen.'"

Gomez soon got a comparable opportunity. After a stint at a Southeast Asian restaurant in Manhattan, Gomez moved to the Bronx and eventually began working for **Épicerie Boulud**, which with Bar Boulud was part of star chef **Daniel Boulud's** newly opened, tri-part Boulud Sud, near Lincoln Center. "Since it was three restaurants connected, I would ask my chef, 'Hey, can I come in on my day off to work and learn something new?' I never went to [a formal] culinary school, but being with Daniel Boulud for five years was a great culinary school."

From there Gomez moved to the two-star Michelin restaurant Atera, followed by the three-star Eleven Madison Park, which topped the 2017 list by the restaurant guide The World's 50 Best. You can see him in the "Eleven Madison Park" episode of the Netflix documentary series "7 Days Out." He then worked in the restaurant's Hamptons pop-up, EMP Summer House, in 2017 and 2018, then EMP Winter House in Aspen. He fell in love with the Colorado town, and secured a job as executive chef at the tony restaurant 7908.

Feeling ready, he applied for the current Portland, Ore-



BRAVO / STEPHANIE DIANI

"Top Chef" contestant Byron Gomez, raised in Central Islip, has worked with such top chefs as Daniel Boulud.

gon, season of "Top Chef." "It was pretty intense," he says of the season that started shooting in early September. "This cast was really amazing. From the beginning we all got along very well. The fact we were in the same boat, going through the same situations, definitely made that bond much better, even to the point where we all keep in touch now."

'Prodigal Son' films at LI's Marshall Field house

BY FRANK LOVECE
Special to Newsday

The Fox investigative drama "Prodigal Son" has shot on Long Island for a second time this season, spending Monday to Wednesday at the **Marshall Field III Main House** in Caumsett State Historic Park Preserve, in Lloyd Harbor.

"I've scouted that state park maybe three or four times in the past five years — I always have it in the back of my head," says location manager **Morgan Roche**. "It's such a beautiful loca-



FOX / PHIL CARUSO

Star Tom Payne

tion. It looks over the Sound. You can see to Connecticut from the house — it's just stunning." But with the state-owned mansion not normally open to the public, "It's got a really great quality of old-school glamour that's also a little creepy."

That, she says, fits the aesthetic of the show, which finds disgraced FBI profiler Malcolm Bright (**Tom Payne**), the son of incarcerated serial killer Dr. Martin "The Surgeon" Whitly (**Michael Sheen**), assisting the NYPD on homicide cases that could

benefit from Bright's insight into the minds of killers. "We tend to take people to places where murders happen and have that great visual element," says the Pittsburgh-raised Roche, 39. "It's beautiful but . . .," she adds puckishly.

The episode, the 12th of this current second season, allows a rare glimpse inside the Gilded Age mansion of businessman Field, heir to the department store chain Marshall Field's, which Macy's absorbed in 2006. "You'll get to see the front foyer, which is this really cool circular room," says Roche. Beyond it is "a sunroom with these floor-to-ceiling French doors, I think five sets of them, out to the

back of the house, which then looks out over the sound. We had a drone unit, too, so you see this huge aerial shot of the house and all the property."

The shoot featured some of the series' principals, as well as "one of our big-name guest stars," says Roche, whose credits include Netflix's "Daredevil," "The Punisher" and other Marvel Comics TV series.

"Prodigal Son" had filmed nearby in December, at a manor home on Cold Spring Road in Laurel Hollow that doubled as an etiquette school in the season's fifth episode, "Bad Manners."

The series, which premiered its second season in January and has aired seven episodes through March 2, returns April 13.

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JUNE 11



'Loki,' the new Marvel Comics series starring Tom Hiddleston, premieres on Disney Plus.