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# Tony Zappone -- commentary & perspectives

*Observations of people and the times...*

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## About Me

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TUESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2008

## The greatest place to eat in Tampa...

I met a new friend last year. His name is **Robert Kim Bailey**. He likes to be called Kim but he's very pleasant and answers to just about everything. He's the master of all master chefs and runs what used to be the best kept secret in town, **Bailey's Catering and Restaurant** in Hyde Park.

Seldom if ever have I looked forward to going to a restaurant every week but his place has become addictive. He closed four weeks over the holidays and I just about went mad. I've also gotten used to his weekly emails featuring his upcoming menu.

His food is simple yet elegant; delicious and nourishing; excellent tasting with a wide appeal. Kim, whose main gig is catering and he stays very busy with that, is only open for dinner nine hours a week. Yep, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 5:30 until 8:30p.m. During those hours you can eat in or you can call ahead and have your prepared meals ready for you to take home.

After you've eaten there a while you develop favorites. I like all the main menu items but I've been seriously affected by the grits he prepares. Nobody in the world makes them so good and they're perfect for eating with his seafood. The summer squash is superb. He even makes turnip greens taste like dessert. All you have to

do is get by there once and you'll keep coming. Kim has promised that when the day comes that he has a continuous packed house, he'll let me eat in a corner of the kitchen. I'm happy with that.

The mayor eats there sometimes and the mayor's mom is there fairly often. Lots of other local celebrities, like big time lawyer Barry Cohen, come with their families to eat with Kim on a regular basis. The REALLY BIG stars, like **John Travolta, Paris Hilton, Jay Leno, Will Smith**, etc., ...celebrities like that...come in disguise. If the food gets too difficult to eat through their fake mustaches, they go out back and finish. Paris has that problem a lot. **Henry Kissinger** just comes as himself but nobody cares.

Each week there's a different menu. A handful of items are offered on a regular basis but a lot of them change. He loves deserts, you can tell, and those change on a regular basis. There are none better in the universe, some traditional and some one of a kind. They all taste better than anybody else could possibly make them.

Now this may read like a restaurant review but it really isn't. It's a tribute to a guy who is passionate about food, who relishes every single bite of everything he takes in. He's a guy who'll spend years replicating a great dish at some distant eatery and put it in his place when it's finally perfect. For instance, his Macadamia Nut ice cream is hundreds times better than the original he first tasted at **Bern's Steakhouse** in Tampa.

Kim likes to be everywhere. On nights he serves at his restaurant (also headquarters for his catering business) he'll be in the kitchen making sure there's quality in every dish; he'll work with the serving staff to be sure things are organized and everyone is being tended to in good order; he'll be in the dining room and around the outside tables in front of his place talking to his customers to be sure they're perfectly happy and in between all that he'll be peeking out back to make certain nobody has to wait long for take out orders.

When he's not around his own place, he's out looking for

fresh vegetables, poultry, seafood, meats and whatever else he needs for his coming fare. He prides himself on putting the very best into what he does. The markets aren't especially fond of his shopping style...he bites into whatever he can to make sure the produce or whatever is fresh and excellent tasting. If not, he'll look elsewhere or just not feature it that week.

Oh, yeah, he's a best-selling author to. His book, ***The North Beach Diet***, fell slightly short of the New York Times best seller list but it did make Pat Robertson's program on satellite. He's also made a number of television appearances talking about the book after people stumbled across it in bookstores. It's just like the ***South Beach Diet*** except you learn about eating good food in great quantities, enjoying the hell out of it and not worrying about whether or not it'll put a few pounds on. You can still order it at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

Kim has a computer tongue. The taste of every great meal he's ever had in his life is recorded in his memory and easily accessible. If you make a special request, chances are at some point he's had it the very best it can be made and he'll improve on that just to accommodate his customers.

He's the very best at what he does...a man extremely passionate about his palate and what's placed on it. His life's desire is to please people with his elegant cooking skills. He stays up late each evening writing email, asking certain customers their opinions about new menu items. He recently wrote to ask what I thought about his ***Goody Goody*** butterscotch pie. It was the best, better than the legendary Tampa hangout ever made it. I asked him to make it more often.

No matter where he tries something, he always wants to do it better and he does. You just have to experience Bailey's Restaurant one time. Get there early or you'll have to sit out back with me.

Kim's website is here: <http://www.baileycatering.com/> Check it out. You can find a link to his weekly menu there...it usually comes out Sunday night or Monday

morning. There's also a neat link to some videos, click up on the right hand corner.

See you at the gym,

**Tony Zappone**

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Posted by Tony Zappone at [8:36 PM](#)

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