

CHARITY

Celebrity chefs heed the call of Norman Love

TV personalities cook for event

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For at least part of Friday morning, three celebrity pastry chefs weren't celebrity pastry chefs.

In the kitchen of Norman Love Confections in south Fort Myers, chefs Florian Bellanger of Food Network's "Cupcake Wars," Keegan Gerhard of "Food Network Challenge," and Johnny Iuzzini of Bravo's "Top Chef: Just Desserts," weren't made-up faces dramatically tearing apart the dishes of their chef contestants.

They were mere cooks: peeling apples, baking brownies and burning themselves on molten sesame brittle — all in the name of their good friend Norman Love.

Love wrangled this celebrity trio to cook with him for Friday's 3 Wishes charity event in downtown Fort Myers. The 160-person dinner took place at the Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center, raising about \$300,000 for Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida, Ronald McDonald House Charities and Make-A-Wish Foundation.

"We talked about this, didn't we Johnny?" Gerhard said, looking up at the slick-haired Iuzzini from his tray of Granny Smiths. "There aren't many people we still call Chef, but Norman is one of them."

And when Chef Norman calls, even the busiest of celebrities drops everything to help.

"Norman is, I mean, one of the most respected names in our industry," Iuzzini said, slicing wobbly slabs of chocolate gelee into perfect rectangles. "We joke with each other about being the



From left, Keegan Gerhard, Norman Love, Johnny Iuzzini and Florian Bellanger started early Friday morning in Norman Love Confections to help create delicious desserts for the 3 Wishes charity event. GUY TUBBS/THE NEWS-PRESS



See photos from the 3 Wishes charity dinner at news-press.com

'Cupcake Guy' or whatever else, but the truth is Florian and Keegan and Norman are masters of the craft."

The visit hasn't been all work for these masters.

Love treated his chef friends to a buffet of homemade pastries and croissants layered with almond butter and soaked in orange-blossom-infused simple syrup. This morning, Love is taking the chefs fishing in the turquoise waters of the Gulf of Mexico. And, as with the competitions these guys judge, there is money on the line: for biggest fish, and for the

most fish caught.

"I've known Norman for about 20 years, long before people associated me as the 'Cupcake Wars' guy," Bellanger laughed after turning out a pot of ice-cream base he'd warmed to exactly 85 degrees Celsius.

"We came here for the opportunity of giving back to a great cause like the 3 Wishes, but at the same time we love being together and cooking and creating. Let's face it: We run restaurants and do TV shows, we don't get to bake like this every day."

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Laughter fills the Norman Love Confections kitchen Friday morning as Keegan Gerhard, right, exchanges stories with Johnny Iuzzini while prepping apples.