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The Embrace of Aging

Documentary explores how men can live healthier, longer

By Jeanine Matlow

In order for a topic to entice Keith Famie, it begins with “an emotional gut curiosity,” says the documentary filmmaker, former restaurateur and chef (Les Auteurs, Forte), reality TV star (“Survivor: The Australian Outback”) and creator of the Food Network series “Keith Famie’s Adventures.”

“It must touch people in some way with a message they can adapt to their own lives,” Famie says. The vision for his latest creation, “The Embrace of Aging,” was to learn how men can live healthier longer, an interest Famie says he developed when his father died of Alzheimer’s disease in 2003.

After two years of filming, he uncovered many common denominators to healthy longevity. “Clearly, exercise and movement, even if it’s just walking,” Famie, 52, says. “We as a society have a type of work that’s different from our parents. We sit a lot. Technology is wonderful, but it’s not the way the human body was designed.”

Common-sense eating was another obvious thread. “We have been taught what good eating is,” says Famie, who lives in Novi. “The most important thing I learned is a very simple one: When you get into your 50s, you are no longer a young man. Trying to stay young is an act of discipline. For men, heart disease starts much earlier. You have to be proactive far sooner.”

Socialization was among the less expected links to longevity. “Women know the importance of social skills and friendships,” says Famie, who found tango dancing to be another eye-opener. “To be in the world of dance, you have to have a partner.” Tango, said to be better for the brain than crossword puzzles, also helps improve balance.

Famie’s “aha moment” came when he found that having a

purpose above and beyond what we do every day has a profound impact on the quality of our lives. It can be faith or volunteering, something that affects humanity in some way.

Going Strong

Famie went to Sardinia, Italy – one of the places in “The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who’ve Lived the Longest” by Dan Buettner – where men and women often live to be older than 100, without medication or vitamins. “They walk everywhere uphill. It’s hard to keep up with them,” Famie says. “They have a low-calorie intake. They don’t eat anything unless they raise or grow it, and they consume a tremendous amount of fruits and vegetables.”

They make their own wine with local grapes that are high in antioxidants, but it goes deeper. “They live life. They laugh. They’re not afraid of aging,” Famie says. “The older and younger generations all mix together. They socialize in the park in the afternoon.”

As Famie reminds us, everyone has an expiration date. “So much information is given to us; shame on us if we don’t use what we know. We’re not going to win it, but we can put up one hell of a fight,” he says.

“We need to grab onto life and hold on as long as we can,” Famie says. “It’s every guy’s responsibility, if not for himself then for his loved ones, to embrace serious discipline as if he were playing his most competitive sport.”



Keith Famie (left) and Tom Rifai, M.D., in Sardinia, Italy.

Heart Smart

Kim Eagle, M.D., director of the Cardiovascular Center at University of Michigan Health System, worked with Famie on the parts of the film that address aging and the cardiovascular system. His advice is to get checked and be evaluated by a competent physician to develop a strategy for prevention.

“Try to achieve a very healthy lifestyle every day. Watch how much you eat, watch how much you drink, and do some form of movement,” says Eagle, who recently gave pedometers to his relatives as stocking stuffers. “There is something about having that little target [10,000 steps] in your pocket every day.”

Eagle also recognizes the importance of having a purpose and connections. “Some men tend to be loners,” he says. “Take a fishing trip with friends. Those are important connections that will fuel you the rest of the year.”

Get Well Soon

Tom Rifai, M.D., medical director of metabolic nutrition and weight management for St. Joseph Mercy Oakland, joined Famie in Sardinia. Their lifestyle “is a striking reinforcement of facts that many people still want to deny,” he says.

In Sardinia, people typically walk six miles per day. “They’re not thinking about it. This is part of

Film Premiere

Interested in the new feature film “The Embrace of Aging”? Then get your tickets to the premiere of the film by Keith Famie, Novi resident, documentary filmmaker, former restaurateur and chef, and reality TV star. The event, 5 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 24, at Shriners Silver Gardens in Southfield, will include dinner, featuring a healthy, grazing-style menu and music by Stewart Francke. Stand-up comedian Bill Mihalic will talk about aging. Tickets cost \$75 per person. More information: 248.869.0096

their lifestyle,” says Rifai, who adds he believes healthy longevity comes down to some key concepts.

“Calorie control enhanced by an environment that makes it healthy to do so, no cookies on the counter, with built-in purposeful movement, as opposed to a workout routine, attached to some other purpose,” he says.

Rifai stresses that a little goes a long way. “Find a structured program, and distance yourself from unhealthy food sources,” he says. “Protect your castle. Instead of the circus where everything is available, you have to set up your home environment like the jungle.”

For more information on the film, go to www.embraceofaging.com.

ABOUT VEP

The 10-time Emmy Award-winning Visionalist Entertainment Productions was established in 1997 by Executive Producer and Director Keith Famie, who created a series for various network-affiliate television stations based on his adventurous cooking in exotic locations around the globe.