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10-year-old Belle (left) and 7-year-old Olivia display the Caprese salad they made during a taping of Spatulatta. Sisters Belle and Olivia live in Evanston and the online cooking show is produced by Evanston resident Gaylon Emerzian. (Allen Kaleta/For Pioneer Press)

Online cooking for kids

Spatulatta.com offers a lot of fun and a lot of learning

By Stephanie Fosnight

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Pioneer Press

Standing on a step stool hidden behind the kitchen island, Olivia faces the camera and announces, "I'm ready to rock and roll. Just let me get

my apron tighter."

At age 7, Olivia is already a cooking show pro. So is her 10-year-old sister, Belle. The two Evanston girls are the stars of Spatulatta.com, an online cooking show for kids.

Spatulatta is the brainchild of educational film producer Gaylon Emerzian, also an Evanston resident. While making a film about the food pyramid several years ago, Emerzian was struck by the reaction of the 10-year-old star who learned to make his own pizza for the project.

"He was beaming, like somebody gave him a million dollars," she said. "That's when I knew kids really could cook."

Emerzian launched www.Spatulatta.com this May and already kids around the world are learning to cook from the site. Recipes are presented along with online video clips showing Belle and Olivia preparing the dishes, with occasional help from their mom, Heidi. Heidi also develops crafts that correspond to the recipes.

"Sometimes the recipes can be hard and it might be a little frustrating at first, but then you start to get the hang of it," said Olivia.

Belle remembers one pre-Spatulatta cooking experiment that went to feed the family dog. Now she's proud that she can cook dinner.

"Most kids think cooking is for parents," she said.

Emerzian selects recipes that emphasize international flavors and healthy eating. Heidi was surprised by how much her daughters enjoyed the spanakopita (a spinach-filled pastry) they made for the Greek program.

"The Japanese day was really good," Belle said. "We made sushi and teriyaki chicken."

On this Tuesday, the girls are making Italian foods for the camera. It's Olivia's turn, so Belle heads to the living room and reads a book while her sister takes over.

Olivia glances one more time at the recipe for Caprese salad while her mom reminds her to call Belle into the kitchen to slice the mozzarella cheese. Emerzian starts the camera and films Olivia's fingers as she announces the recipe and points to the different ingredients.



Olivia and her mother Heidi go over a recipe before taping an episode of Spatulatta. (Allen Kaleta/For Pioneer Press)

"Now let's do your face and talk about what you're going to do," Emerzian says, and Olivia looks comfortably into the camera and repeats her lines.

About half an hour later, though, Olivia's concentration is slipping and she's giggling, singing and playing with her bracelet. She and Belle start to improvise goofy lines as the crew takes a break to sample the Caprese salad.

"Ham and cheese, we call them," Heidi said.



Belle (left) and Olivia have become on-camera pros since they started taping Spatulatta with Emerzian last May. (Allen Kaleta/For Pioneer Press)

Caprese Salad

- 3 big ripe tomatoes
- 4 balls of fresh mozzarella cheese
- 12 basil leaves
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

Have an adult slice the tomatoes. Ripe tomatoes can be difficult to cut because of the differences between the tough skin and the softer inside. The round shape of the tomato makes it way too easy for a sharp knife to just slide off and possibly cut you instead.

Meanwhile you can cut the mozzarella with a butter knife.

Arrange the tomato slices and slices of cheese on plate. Place the basil leaves in a pretty design. Drizzle a little oil over the salad using a zigzag motion. Sprinkle on a little salt and a little pepper.

Your salad, made in the colors of the Italian flag, is done!

Pesto

- 2 C of basil leaves, firmly packed
- 6 cloves of garlic, peeled
- 4 T pine nuts
- 1/2 C grated parmesan cheese
- 1/2 to 3/4 C extra virgin olive oil

Wash your basil and pat it dry. Pull the leaves from the stem and take the tail off each leaf.

Have an adult or older sibling put the blade into the food processor. The blade is very sharp so it should be handled with care.

Because we started with chunks of parmesan, we put them in the food processor first and "processed" them until they looked like grated cheese. If you are using pre-grated parmesan you can add it when you add the pine nuts.

Pack the basil leaves into a measuring cup. Pack them firmly but not too tight. Put the basil leaves into the blender. Process them a little.

Measure the olive oil and pour into the food processor or blender. The weight of the oil should be just enough to press down on the leaves and move them all the way to the bottom. If not, open the blender and scrape the side with a spatula. Add the pine nuts. Process until everything is mixed well.

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