



# Olive challenge for chef

By Helen Gregory

GIOVANNI Castrignano often works 14-hour days, creating culinary delights for the customers of his Italian restaurant. But he never complains.

"I can be tired, but I'm always happy. Cooking is a lifestyle for me," he said.

The 38-year-old is the only local chef to be invited to participate in the Festival of the Olive, alongside other expert chefs who will be creating dishes using olives and olive oil.

"I will be giving a demonstration and cooking a traditional southern Italian spaghetti plate, using extra virgin olive oil, olives and seafood," Mr Castrignano said.

The festival will be held on October 20 and 21, at Elizabeth Farm, which is home to Australia's oldest European olive tree.

Mr Castrignano's passion for cooking began at an early age, and after a job as a police officer guarding the Pope, he graduated as a master chef from the Rome International Chef School in 1989.

"My family have owned restaurants in Italy for 200 years, so cooking was always in my blood," he said.

Mr Castrignano keeps close to his heart recipes which have been passed down from his grandfather including a traditional tomato-based Napoli sauce which is cooked slowly for eight hours.



**Italian know-how:** Giovanni Castrignano is a whiz in the kitchen.

**Picture:** Wolter Peeters

"Although it is a traditional recipe, it has been perfected by me," Mr Castrignano said. "It has my personal touch, which is what all chefs should do. You can't just read a recipe - it has to be a piece of art: you have to put part of yourself into it."

Mr Castrignano has owned and

managed restaurants in Naples, Rome, Costa Rica, Newark (New Jersey) and the Belford Hotel in Miami, Florida, where he once cooked risotto for Bruce Willis and Demi Moore.

After arriving in Australia in 1998 he owned and operated restaurants in Leichhardt, Peter-

sham and Sefton before settling in Parramatta seven months ago.

"Australia is my favourite place because they are open minded and willing to try new things," he said. "I can be innovate with traditional Italian dishes."

Giovanni's Trattoria is at 56 Phillip Street, Parramatta.



