



April 13, 2011



Easter dinner is served at the home of John and Florence Iavarone, owners of Iavarone Bros. Italian markets on Long Island. Family patriarch Joe Iavarone Sr. leads the family in prayer before dinner. (March 30, 2011) Photo Credit: Michael Gross



Roasted lamb is passed at the dinner table of John and Florence Iavarone, owners of Iavarone Bros. Italian markets on Long Island. (March 30, 2011) Photo Credit: Michael Gross







Florence Iavarone bastes her roasted artichokes in her home. It was Florence who prepared the feast in her mother-in-law's honor. "She was a wonderful woman," Florence said about the matriarch who died in January, "and I learned so much more from her than just cooking." (March 30, 2011) Photo Credit: Michael Gross



Florence Iavarone slices her sweet spaghetti pie. (March 30, 2011) Photo Credit: Michael Gross





Roasted artichokes served at the home of John and Florence Iavarone. (March 30, 2011)  
Photo Credit: Michael Gross



Sliced [Easter](#) lamb is served at the Iavarone home. While Florence was monitoring the temperature of the leg of lamb with a high-tech probe thermometer, the men in the family pointedly ignored its digital readout, preferring to assess the meat's progress by peeking and prodding. (March 30, 2011) Photo Credit: Michael Gross







Easter asparagus is served at the home of John and Florence Iavarone. The recipe comes from matriarch Angelina Iavarone's most beloved recipe for braised, stuffed artichokes. (March 30, 2011) Photo Credit: Michael Gross



Italian cheesecake is served at the home of John and Florence Iavarone, owners of Iavarone Bros. markets on Long Island. (March 30, 2011) Photo Credit: Michael Gross





Roasted potatoes are part of the Easter meal at the home of John and Florence Iavarone, owners of Iavarone Bros. Italian markets. The secret to tender, crusty roast potatoes, says Florence Iavarone, is to use plenty of olive oil. (March 30, 2011) Photo Credit: Michael Gross



Easter eggs adorn the dinner table at the home of John and Florence Iavarone, owners of Iavarone Bros. Italian markets on Long Island. (March 30, 2011) Photo Credit: Michael Gross







Italian cheesecake is served at the home of John and Florence Iavarone. (March 30, 2011) Photo Credit: Michael Gross



Florence Iavarone slices her sweet spaghetti pie. This satisfying recipe, a specialty of the late Angelina Iavarone, is essentially the same as that classic Jewish holiday dish, noodle kugel. (March 30, 2011) Photo Credit: Michael Gross





Meet our new food columnist

grandchildren, but right there on the table, in the lavaronos holiday recipes.

The three brothers, Pat, John and Joe Jr., work long hours running their four stores, along with Pat's sons Christopher and Jonathan, and John's daughter Michele. But the family that works together

seems to genuinely enjoy playing -- and eating -- together. Holidays are particularly precious since **Christmas**, New Year's and Easter are the only days of the year that lavarone Bros. is closed.

"We always gather at the holidays," said John's wife, Florence. As the adults catch up with one another, the youngest generation (twins John and Grace Thomas, 2, and Pasquale lavarone, 4 months) are doted upon indiscriminately by parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, great-aunts, great-uncles and, especially, by their great-grandfather, Joe Sr.

It was Florence who prepared the feast in her mother-in-law's honor. "She was a wonderful woman," Florence said, "and I learned so much more from her than just cooking."

Florence's menu blended her own Raio family recipes with Angelina lavarone's. "We always have two spaghetti pies," she said. "From my family it's the savory, Angelina's is the sweet." Angelina's most beloved recipe is her braised, stuffed artichokes. "My family didn't put bread crumbs in the artichokes but Angelina did, and they are the best you ever tasted."

In her spacious kitchen, Florence handles the appetizers, side dishes and desserts but it is the men of the family -- Joe Sr. and his three sons -- who oversee the meat. While Florence was monitoring the temperature of the leg of lamb with a high-tech probe thermometer, the men pointedly ignored its digital readout, preferring to assess the meat's progress by peeking and prodding. After it had rested outside the oven, John was summoned to carve. "He's the best butcher," conceded his little brother Joe. The roast was perfect, juicy and rosy-pink throughout.

The challenge at an lavarone holiday meal is to still be hungry when the meal proper is served. As soon as people arrive, noshing is strongly encouraged. Antipasto platters are brought "from the store." Florence is famous for her pizza rustica, a hearty savory pie filled with eggs, cheese, prosciutto and sausage. The same filling ingredients are used to delicious effect in her savory spaghetti pie, a recipe she inherited from her own grandmother. "My grandmother swore me to secrecy with this recipe," she said. "She wouldn't even tell her own sister-in-law how she made it . . . or she would tell her but she would always leave out something crucial."

Florence claimed she would, indeed, share her recipes (unredacted) with her own children, Daniele and Michele, who manages the Maspeth store. Is Michele prepared to be the keeper of such a culinary treasure? "I'm up for it," she said, "but it's never really the same. The recipe depends on the hands making it."

## ANGELINA'S STUFFED ARTICHOKEs

These artichokes were the signature dish of Angelina lavarone, Florence's mother-in-law. The family agrees that, as good as Florence's version is, Angelina's had some ineffable quality that no one can duplicate. For an appetizer, the lavarones usually serve half an artichoke for each guest. The recipe can be doubled easily.

6 large artichokes

Salt and pepper

4 to 5 cloves garlic, minced

1/4 to 1/2 cup chopped parsley

1 1/2 to 2 cups seasoned bread crumbs

Extra-virgin olive oil

**1.** Cut off the top inch or so from each artichoke. Cut off the stems and trim the bases so they will sit upright. Peel the stems and set aside.

**2.** Spread leaves of artichokes apart and season with salt and pepper, then sprinkle with garlic and parsley, making sure seasoning gets down into leaves. In a small bowl, moisten bread crumbs with a tablespoon or so of olive oil. Stuff into leaves.

**3.** Place artichokes, along with stems, in a lidded pot large enough to hold them snugly. Pour water in so that it comes halfway up the artichokes. Drizzle with more olive oil and bring water to a boil. Immediately lower heat to a slow simmer, cover pot and cook until artichoke leaves are tender, about an hour. Makes 12 servings.



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## ROAST LEG OF LAMB

The lavarones like to roast a boneless leg of lamb because it cooks more evenly and is easier to carve. Your butcher will sell you a rolled, boneless leg of lamb. Ask him for some butcher's twine as well. At home, unroll the roast, add the seasonings, then roll it back up and secure with the twine.

1 bunch of fresh rosemary

1 (4- to 5-pound) boneless (butterflied) leg of lamb

2 to 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 to 4 cloves garlic, minced

Salt and pepper

1. The roast should come out of the refrigerator two hours before cooking, so season it the night before or the morning of the day you plan to serve.
2. Remove needles from 2 or 3 sprigs of rosemary and set aside. Lay lamb on a work surface, cut-side facing up. Rub a few spoonfuls of oil all over, then sprinkle on rosemary, garlic and a generous amount of salt and pepper. Roll meat into a uniform shape and tie with twine. Coat outside of roast with more olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Refrigerate lamb until an hour or two before roasting it.
3. Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Place lamb on a rack and roast for 15 minutes. Lower heat to 350 and cook until an instant-read thermometer reads 125 for medium-rare, 130 for medium, 140 for well done -- anywhere from 60 to 90 minutes, depending on the size and temperature of the roast.
4. Remove roast to a platter and let it sit, covered loosely with foil, for at least 20 (and up to 45) minutes before carving. Pour pan drippings into a heatproof vessel and skim off most of the fat. Keep juices warm to serve with roast. Garnish platter with rosemary sprigs. Makes 12 to 16 servings.

## ASPARAGUS AU GRATIN

3 pounds asparagus

1 cup low-sodium chicken broth 1/2 pound (1 stick) butter, melted

2/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese (1/4 pound)

2/3 cup shredded Fontina (1/4 pound)

2/3 cup seasoned bread crumbs

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Bring a large pot of salted water to boil. Trim woody ends of asparagus and peel, if necessary. Blanch for 1 minute and then transfer immediately to a large bowl of cold water.
2. Pat asparagus dry and lay in a 12-by-15-inch baking dish. Add chicken broth and melted butter. Top with cheeses and bread crumbs. Bake asparagus until tender and topping has browned, about 10 to 20 minutes, depending on thickness of spears. Makes 12 to 16 servings.

## PIZZA RUSTICA

This recipe, a thick pie filled with cheese and cured meats, was handed down from Florence lavarone's grandmother and is always on hand when the lavarone family gathers for a holiday meal. For the pastry dough, use a recipe calling for at least 5 cups of flour, or use store-bought pie crust.

Pastry dough for a 10-inch deep-dish double-crust pie

5 eggs

1 (15-ounce) tub ricotta cheese (about 2 cups)

1 pound mozzarella, diced

1/4 cup Parmesan or Pecorino Romano cheese

2 pounds dry Italian sausage (e.g. salami, soppressata), diced

1/4 pound prosciutto, sliced thick and diced

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line the bottom of a deep, 10-inch pie pan with about 2/3 of the

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pastry. Set aside the rest, keeping it covered.

**2.** In a large bowl, beat eggs. Add ricotta, mozzarella, Parmesan, dry sausage and prosciutto, and stir to combine. Pour mixture into pie pan and top with remaining pastry. Crimp edges to seal, then make a few slits in the top so steam can escape.

**3.** Bake for 15 minutes, then lower heat to 325 degrees and bake 40 to 50 minutes longer, until crust is golden brown. Let stand for at least 20 minutes before serving. It also can be served at room temperature or refrigerated and served cold. Makes 12 to 16 servings.

## ROASTED ROSEMARY POTATOES

The secret to tender, crusty roast potatoes, says Florence Lavarone, is to use plenty of olive oil.

4 pounds red potatoes (or Yukon Golds)

Salt and pepper to taste

1 to 2 teaspoons granulated garlic (or 2 to 4 cloves garlic, minced)

2 to 4 sprigs fresh rosemary, needles removed

3 to 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

**1.** Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Bring a large pot of salted water to boil. Scrub potatoes and cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes. Place potatoes into pot and remove with a slotted spoon as soon as water comes back to boil.

**2.** Spread potatoes on a large sheet pan, sprinkle with salt, pepper, garlic, rosemary and olive oil. Toss to coat evenly. Roast until potatoes are nicely browned and tender, 30 to 45 minutes. Makes 12 to 16 servings.

## SWEET SPAGHETTI PIE

This satisfying recipe, a specialty of the late Angelina Lavarone, is essentially the same as that classic Jewish holiday dish, noodle kugel.

1 pound spaghetti

Butter, for greasing dish

10 eggs

1 (15-ounce) tub ricotta (about 2 cups)

1 cup sugar

1/4 cup diced candied citron (see note)

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 teaspoon cinnamon

**1.** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Boil pasta in plenty of salted water until al dente. Drain and set aside to cool. Butter a 9-by-13-inch baking dish.

**2.** Place eggs in a large bowl and beat. Add ricotta, sugar, citron and vanilla and mix well. Add spaghetti and mix, breaking apart any stuck strands. Sprinkle top with cinnamon and bake until center is firm and top is nicely browned, about 45 minutes to an hour. Let sit for at least 30 minutes before serving. Can be served warm or cold. Makes 12 to 16 servings.

**Note:** Candied citron, the sugar-impregnated, preserved peel of the citron (which looks like a big, bumpy lemon), can be found in Italian and specialty grocers.

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