

Restaurateur Can Stand the Heat

With the help of his doctors, six-time cancer survivor handles what life dishes up

It could be said that Giorgio Baldi is the luckiest man alive.

If you're a Westside resident, Baldi's name may sound familiar. For the last 21 years, the restaurateur has been serving up authentic Italian cuisine at his trattoria, Il Ristorante di Giorgio Baldi, in Santa Monica Canyon. The personable 66-year-old native of Tuscany cooks in his restaurant kitchen each day, makes a line of pasta sauces and offers warm, personal service to his customers.

Baldi may lead a charmed life, but the road has been rocky. When a fortune teller predicted many years ago that Baldi would die 10 times, the omen stuck with him—but he never dreamed that it could become a reality.

In 1989, Baldi began to experience some changes in his body. "I had a lot of pain in my right arm," Baldi explained. "Nothing felt right anymore." He was feeling shaky and

off balance. Even food and wine didn't taste right to him.

Baldi had been to another Southern California hospital twice before for life-threatening traumas, but didn't find the personalized care he was seeking. After receiving recommendations about the doctors at Saint John's Health Center, he decided to visit the hospital.

Baldi was diagnosed with lung cancer. The team at Saint John's removed the tumor from his right upper lobe, and Baldi quickly returned to work. He decided to get healthy, immediately giving up his three-pack-a-day smoking habit. But three years later, Baldi was back at Saint John's, this time with pain in his left arm. Diagnosed again with lung cancer, his doctor removed a tumor from the left lower lobe of his lung, and Baldi was back in business once again—until nine years later, when he received a new diagnosis: tongue cancer.

"It's a huge challenge treating tongue cancer in a chef," said Robert Wollman, MD, Medical Director, Radiation Oncology, who became Baldi's doctor in 2001. "We wanted to make sure we preserved the salivary glands and taste buds, so he would still be able to taste the food he prepared. To do that, we used a special type of radiation called IMRT [Intensity Modulated Radiation Therapy]. The cutting-edge machine delivered radiation from many angles, and we were able to push the radiation away from the salivary glands. It was very precise, very targeted so that side effects were minimal and Giorgio was able to continue working."

Although Baldi was free of tongue cancer, there was more in store for him. He was diagnosed with bladder cancer in 2003, and his physician, Leslie Kaplan, MD, a board-certified urologist at Saint John's Health Center, performed Transurethral Resection of a Bladder Tumor (TURBT) to remove the papillary transitional cell carcinoma. The procedure was successful, and Baldi went on his way.

A year later, tests revealed adenocarcinoma in the left upper lobe of his lung. The thoracic surgery team at Saint John's removed two different tumors. The procedure was difficult since much of Baldi's lung tissue had already been removed for prior tumors, and

much of the remaining tissue had been damaged from his years of smoking. However, the surgery was a success and Baldi returned to work in good health. He has thankfully remained cancer-free ever since.

"Saint John's has cured him of cancer six times," said Dr. Wollman. "His story is incredible. He should be on the cover of *Time* magazine."

"With every tumor, my life changed, but it made me stronger," Baldi added. "Now I'm feeling good—perfect!"

Baldi appreciates the personal attention he has received at Saint John's, and he knows he's in good hands. "All my doctors and nurses, the anesthesiologists—everybody who works here makes it very nice for me," Baldi said. "They make it comfortable."

Today, Baldi is healthy, strong and in high spirits. He continues to do what makes him happy: spending time in the kitchen and with his friends and family. And he goes to the Health Center for an annual PET/CT scan to make sure his body remains in good health.

"I'm a lucky man," Baldi smiled. "And lucky for coming here."

For more information, please call 800-STJOHNS or visit www.cancercenters.newstjohns.org.