



Graham Morrison

'Fili' takes a break from the kitchen.

Cooking for Mayor Mike

'Fili' Estévez graces Gracie Mansion with his gourmet dishes

By JOE CUNNINGHAM

WHEN Feliberto "Fili" Estévez first arrived in New York in 1987, his primary goal was to learn English, but his talents in the kitchen, which he learned from his mother while growing up in the Dominican Republic, launched him on his extraordinary culinary career.

First, he landed a job as a cook in a hospital, which eventually led to an eight-year gig as a chef at the Four Seasons and finally to his current job as the head chef at Gracie Mansion.

"They do a lot of events and the logistics were similar to what I was doing at the Four Seasons," says Estévez. "It was a perfect match for both of us."

You might think that a man with the vast wealth of Mayor Bloomberg

would have some pretty extravagant tastes, but "Fili" says Hizzoner likes to keep it down-to-earth.

"He enjoys simple things, like popcorn and baked beans," says Estévez. "Green salads. He's very healthy and he really watches what he eats. And he's an easy guy to be around. He doesn't have any pretensions."

Now, Feliberto also has a new TV gig to add to his resume. "What's Cooking at Gracie" follows his exploits as he organizes meals for the city's movers and shakers.

As you might imagine, Estévez is a pretty cool customer when it comes to food preparation, but there's one annual event that gives him butterflies — when the Dominican parade hits town every August.

"When I see 400 to 500 people from my home country, I get nervous," he says. "These are people who know when their pork has the right flavor."

Check out Fili

"What's Cooking at Gracie" airs Tuesdays at 8 p.m. on NYC TV's flagship channel, NYC TV 74. For show recipes, check out www.nyc.gov/tv.

— With Nancy Ayala