

Reviewer gets first look at 'Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution'

Over the past four years I've been doing this, I have reviewed a lot of television shows. But there's no doubt this review is different.

Why? Because this show features a place and people I know. The elementary school in an area of town where I used to work and do community service. The morning deejay with whom I went to college. The church where I used to sing. They're all here.

I'm talking, of course, about "Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution." I had the chance to view the premiere episode and since I know the question you're all asking, I'm going to answer it straightaway.

No. Huntington is not portrayed badly. I had my doubts when I saw the promo that was released last month, but that was clearly just to try and sell some drama (which you can view on www.herald-dispatch.com by



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clicking on the Multimedia link at the top of the page). I think the show does a pretty good job of explaining that our schools have to deal with national guidelines and regulations and that it isn't just a local thing.

And in all honesty, Oliver is very complimentary of Huntington and its people throughout the entire hour — even when they give him a hard time.

When the hour opens, Oliver is trying to get his message out as to why he's here. So he heads straight for a local radio station, 93.7 The Dawg, where he gets an earful from Rod Willis (of Rocky and Rod). It's important



Photo courtesy of ABC/Holly Farrell

Jamie Oliver talks with Central City Elementary students in this scene from "Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution."

to remember that this is a TV show, so there's some dramatization going on here, and Willis plays it perfectly. But it gives the show a good place from which to start as Oliver goes about trying

to change lives.

His first place to do that is Central City Elementary. Here is where we meet school cook Alice Gue, who quickly becomes the star of the show, and I mean that

as a compliment. She makes sure that Oliver knows the rules and is always the first one to question his ideas and methods. But Gue never comes off badly because she's just reacting the same way any of the rest of us would if someone came in off the street and started telling us how to do our jobs. I'm sure there's dramatization going on here as well, but it never feels like it.

You can't help but laugh at Oliver as he struggles to understand the USDA guidelines and menu choices. I'm not saying I don't agree with him that there are healthier alternatives, but it's just funny that he doesn't quite get it. I especially got a kick out of his amazement over breakfast pizza, because I thought it looked pretty good.

Oliver finds a friend in Pastor Steve Willis of First Baptist Church of Kenova. Willis

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Oliver

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introduces Oliver to the Edwards Family and Oliver sets out to teach them how to cook and eat healthier. Again, it's important to say that Oliver never places blame on anyone. He's just trying to change bad habits.

But then, just before the end of the show, things go haywire for him. Just as he's starting to feel good about things, his own words come back to bite him. I'm of course talking about the British television interview that was discussed in a front page story in *The Herald-Dispatch* last year that angered residents because it painted them as "ignorant." Oliver is devastated and even refers to the article as making his "life a bloody hell." But it's when he has to confront the staff at Central City Elementary that he really gets an earful. And in my opinion, this is when Huntington really shines as Gue and others stand up for their city and their community. Oliver can only listen and apologize, but no one cuts him any slack. I personally think it's the best moment of the show.

When the hour ends, Oliver is reduced to tears as he faces his toughest task: figuring out how to plan a week's school menu his way while still following the necessary guidelines and budgets. He knows it's a task he hasn't made any easier with his comments.

Now of course we all know it's going to turn out alright by the time *Rascal Flatts* takes the Keith-Albee stage, but it certainly gets the show off to a dramatic start.

So now that I've said all that let me get back to normal with this review and do what I would normally do and tell you if the show is actually any good. Honestly, if it didn't involve Huntington, I wouldn't watch it because it's just not my thing — which is not to say that it's not worth watching. I was just bothered a little by the flow of the hour, and quite frankly, it's Oliver who doesn't always come off well. But I'd say it has real promise now that the initial setup is done.

I still have to question, however, ABC scheduling the show Fridays at 9 p.m. Friday nights are known to be a pretty low viewing time, so I'm wondering what ABC's strategy is with such an obviously family-oriented show. I can't help but wonder if they're not sure about it themselves. But that's just my opinion.

I can't wait to hear your opinions when the show debuts next month.

"Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution" premieres Friday, March 26, at 9 p.m. on ABC.

Angela Henderson writes the *Stay Tuned* blog on www.herald-dispatch.com.