

Scott Conant's Former Restaurant Scarpetta Is Sued for Wage Theft, Low Pay

Five current and former workers at Scott Conant's flagship restaurant are suing Conant and Scarpetta for wage theft
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The celebrity chef and 'Chopped' judge has not been involved with the original Scarpetta location for nine months.



Celebrity chef and Chopped judge Scott Conant and his flagship restaurant, Scarpetta, located in the Meatpacking District of New York City, are being named in a wage theft lawsuit that was just filed with Manhattan Federal Court. According to the New York Daily News, five past and present employees have sued Scarpetta and former executive chef Scott Conant for paying them less than minimum wage, withholding tips, and cheating them out of overtime. More than 20 current and former workers have joined the lawsuit, and the prosecutors are seeking class action status. Chef Conant has not been

affiliated with the Meatpacking District location of Scarpetta since September 2014; however, he is still named in the lawsuit because New York State labor law has a six-year statute of limitations, during which employees can legally claim back wages.

"I understand and value the importance of each person on a restaurant's staff and would never knowingly withhold money from an employee or deny them hours worked," chef Conant told The Daily Meal. "I have not been involved with Scarpetta New York for a year, and have not spent time in the restaurant in nearly three years. I respect the staff's grievances, but I have not and am not involved with the New York City restaurant and that aspect of the business."

Complainant Evans Rivera told The Daily News that he was fired in April after complaining about the unfair system that stiffed workers out of their tips. The tipping system in place, according to Rivera's lawyer Jeffrey Goldman, meant that each of the workers made less than the requisite \$7.25 per hour minimum wage.

"I gave my life to them," said Rivera. "I respected them, but they just didn't care."

The lawsuit names a number of instances in which Conant allegedly lost his cool in the kitchen, including a time when he "[yelled] at the tipped employees concerning a customer's missing cell phone." Conant did not comment further on the case.

This is not the only time that a well-known chef has been sued for labor violations. In recent years, both Tom Colicchio and Mario Batali have been slapped with wage theft lawsuits. In fact, attorney Jeffrey Goldman has seen an uptick in these suits.

"I think the reason for the uptrend is that up until recently, workers haven't known what their legal rights are," he told The Daily Meal. "Through the litigation that's happened, they've learned about the illegal practices that have gone on in their lives."