

EXCLUSIVE: Celebrity chef, Manhattan restaurant sued over low wages, owed pay

BY CHRIS SOMMERFELDT, STEPHEN REX BROWN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS Friday, June 12, 2015, 2:30 AM

A celebrity chef is in the soup for stiffing workers at his trendy Meatpacking District restaurant.



Past and present employees at Scarpetta are suing the upscale Italian eatery and chef Scott Conant for paying them less than minimum wage, withholding tips and cheating them out of overtime.

The suit, which was filed in Manhattan Federal Court on behalf of five workers, seeks class action status.

Chef Scott Conant was a judge on 'Chopped' and a guest judge on 'Top Chef.' He is a defendant in a lawsuit against Scarpetta, a restaurant accused of cheating workers out of pay.

Evans Rivera, 38, told the Daily News he was fired in April from his busboy gig after he complained to management about a tipping system that screwed workers out of at least \$50 a night.

"I gave my life to them," said Rivera, from Honduras, with tears in his eyes. "I respected them but they just didn't care."

Rivera's lawyer, Jeffrey Goldman, said the tipping system, in which tips were pooled and included in paychecks, made total wages fall below the legal minimum of \$7.25 an hour.

"The tip credit was inadequate," Goldman said.

Tips were also shared with sommeliers and others with managerial roles that should have made them ineligible for the cash, the suit charges.

Over 20 workers have already joined the suit filed earlier this month, filings show.

Conant — a judge on "Chopped" and a guest judge on "Top Chef" — cashed out of Scarpetta last year, but is named as a defendant. He's described as a stern chef who ruled the restaurant with an iron skillet.

More than 20 workers have joined the lawsuit accusing Scarpetta (pictured) of low pay and withholding tips.

He "demanded a manager write up a server due to a customer complaint" and on another occasion "yelled at the tipped employees concerning a customer's missing cell phone," papers allege.

Conant had no comment.

Rivera said he got along well with Conant, but that restaurant owner Antanello Paganuzzi, who is also named in the suit, looked at him angrily after he complained.

"I felt like they didn't like me anymore," Rivera said.

Paganuzzi didn't respond to a request for comment. The restaurant has locations in Montauk, L.I., Miami, Beverly Hills and Las Vegas.

