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By Kendra Evensen kevensen@journalnet.com |

POCATELLO — A popular Pocatello chef died tragically on Tuesday while he was in Cancun, Mexico, for his daughter’s wedding.

Robert Wiscombe, the executive chef and soon to be co-owner of Cafe Tuscano, reportedly fell off a hotel balcony early Tuesday morning, friends said. No additional details about the 43-year-old’s death were available Tuesday, but friends said they were shocked and saddened by the news.

“It is still shocking. You never want to believe bad news like that,” said Corey Wight, owner of the Sand Trap restaurant in Pocatello.

Wight said Wiscombe, his former employer, taught him a lot about the restaurant and catering business, and encouraged him to attend culinary arts school.

“He was definitely a genuine guy and was always willing to go the extra mile for somebody in need,” Wight said, adding that he proposed to his wife, Caroline, at the Continental Bistro that Wiscombe co-owned before it closed in 2008. “We had our reception there, and Rob treated us like family.”

Bill Isley, one of the co-owners of Cafe Tuscano, said Wiscombe was at the height of his career.

Wiscombe was moving into a co-ownership position at Cafe Tuscano and was going to be a co-owner in another restaurant that Isley and his partners are planning to open in Denver.

“He was right at the height of his creativity and was feeling extremely good about himself,” Isley said, adding that they had a record-breaking number of customers at Cafe Tuscano last week, and a record-breaking number over the weekend, just before Wiscombe left for Mexico.

Wiscombe sent a text to Isley on Sunday evening, which read, “You have empowered me so greatly ... I am so thankful you took a chance on me. Sure feels great to be here, my future is very promising ...”

Isley said Wiscombe was very talented with food, and they sought him out when they opened Cafe Tuscano in 2011 because of his skills, as well as the respect he had in the community.

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He will live on in the fact that his menus and recipes will continue to be used at Cafe Tuscano.

Isley said it may take several employees to cover everything that Wiscombe did.

“He could feed a full house at the cafe on Friday,” Isley said, “and he would be catering somewhere else in Pocatello (at the same time).”

Isley said many will feel his loss.

“Rob Wiscombe will be very sorely missed by very many people in this community,” Isley said.

Martin Hackworth, who has been friends with Wiscombe for 15 years, said it’s tough to find people with the kind of professionalism, drive and vision that he had.

“(He created) great places to go and he ran them the right way,” said Hackworth, a physics instructor at Idaho State University and a columnist for the Idaho State Journal.

Hackworth added that Wiscombe also treated his customers and employees right.

“He did everything the way it should be done,” Hackworth said.

Funeral arrangements for Wiscombe are pending under the direction of Wilks Funeral Home in Chubbuck. Condolences can be sent to his family at www.wilksfuneralhome.com.

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