

FOOD & *Spirits*

Volume 2 / Issue 5 \$4.95 FREE IN OMAHA METRO

The Omaha Metro's Only Guide for Food, Dining, Spirits and Wine.

MAGAZINE | OMAHA EDITION

Taxis' Grille & Bar pg. 14

Popping Your Cork pg. 48



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THE FOOD BANK



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FOOD

- When your looking at dining options, 24th Street is loaded. We take a look at some of the places that make 24th St. 'the longest street in the world'.
- Marshmallows made easy and just in time for the cold season. Janet Mar tells us just how it's done.
- The Thunderbird Salad is an Omaha original and we get a look at how it came to be by chef Steve Villamonte.



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INDUSTRY

- What does the Omaha food scene look like through the eyes of a chef from Portland? New Omahan chef Michael De Smet gives his take on what the good life has to offer.
- The ACF's (Heartland Chapter) latest Omaha Standard takes a look at Omaha mainstay Orsi's and their fabulous breadcrumbs. Also a look around town and the places that serve homemade pickles.



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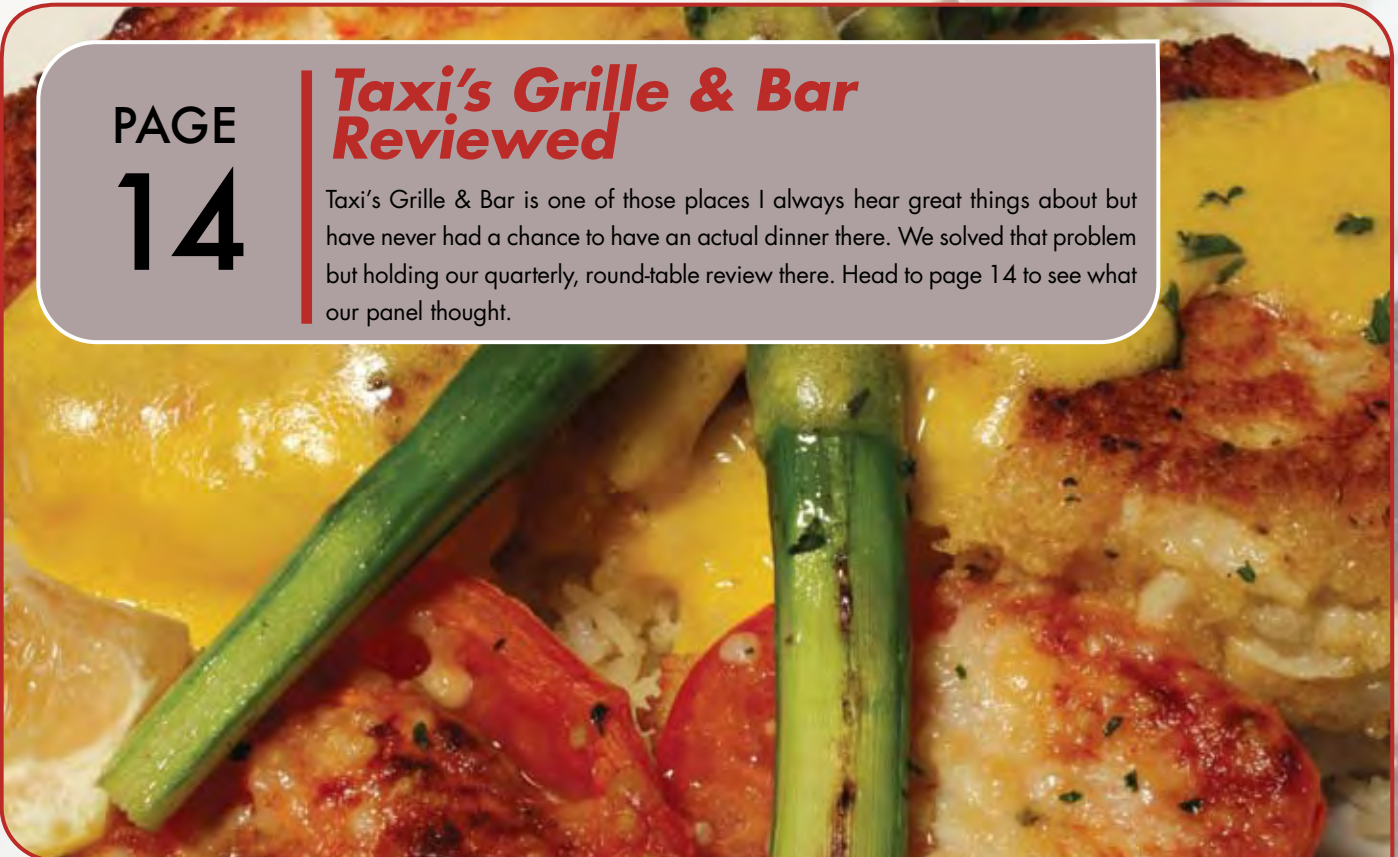
SPIRITS

- Dan Crowell interviews Matt Stamp, General Manager at V. Mertz, about their unique approach to creating cocktails.
- Barrel aging beer has been a time-honored tradition for centuries. Paul Kavulak tells us why barrel aging is still relevant.
- We've all heard red wine can be healthy but do you know why? Wine guru John Fischer spills details.

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**Taxi's Grille & Bar
Reviewed**

Taxi's Grille & Bar is one of those places I always hear great things about but have never had a chance to have an actual dinner there. We solved that problem but holding our quarterly, round-table review there. Head to page 14 to see what our panel thought.





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In Nebraska, eating fresh this time of year can be a challenge. But there are options - guest writer Brian Smith tells how to do it without breaking the bank.



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Tacos in Omaha? You know it and we take a look at where to find some of the best in this user-friendly taco primer.



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Our resident food service warrior gives the lowdown on the people in the back of the house that make every successful restaurant go.



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In the midst of a difficult economy, restaurants have to find a way to control costs while still providing a quality meal. We take a look at some of the resources available that help.



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Although Cuthills Vineyard is all the way in Pierce, Nebraska, their wine is making its way to the metro. We invited Cuthills Vineyard co-owner Ed Swanson to tell us about his wine.



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Is there any better way to say it than with meat? Honestly, one of the best thing about this season is all the assorted gift meats. The Dumpster takes a look at this alarming trend.

On the Cover

On the cover is the halibut seafood special of the night at Taxi's Grille & Bar. We ordered it blackened and it came with rice and mixed vegetables. Yummy!

Photo by David Ahlquist



NATIONAL FOOD & SPIRITS DAY

DECEMBER

- 15 Cup Cake Day
- 17 Maple Syrup Day
- 20 Sangria Day
- 21 Hamburger Day
- 24 Egg Nog Day
- 25 Pumpkin Pie Day
- 26 Candy Cane Day
- 27 Fruit Cake Day
- 29 Pepper Pot Day

National Fruit Cake Month

National Egg Nog Month

JANUARY

- 1 Bloody Mary Day
- 4 Spaghetti Day
- 10 Bittersweet Chocolate Day
- 11 Hot Toddy Day
- 19 Popcorn Day
- 20 Cheese Lover's Day
- 24 Peanut Butter Day
- 28 Blueberry Pancake Day
- 31 Brandy Alexander Day

National Candy Month

National Soup Month

National Pizza Week - Second Week

FEBRUARY

- 2 Heavenly Hash Day
- 5 Chocolate Fondue Day
- 9 Bagels and Lox Day
- 9 Pizza Pie Day
- 11 Don't Cry Over Spilled Milk Day
- 18 Drink Wine Day
- 21 Sticky Bun Day
- 25 Chocolate-Covered Nuts Day

Potato Lover's Month

Celebration of Chocolate Month



LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

This issue of Food & Spirits Magazine, our fifth, marks one year that FSM has been out on the streets and that we've been in business. As I sit here, writing this letter from the publisher (always the last thing I do, no matter how much I try to get it done sooner) and reflect on the last year, an overwhelming feeling of relief comes over me.

While FSM has had its own perils to overcome over that year, so much has been going outside of our business too with the national economy going completely in the crapper. Yeah, Food & Spirits Magazine is fortunate to be here, and, to a degree, aren't we all.

Whether or not the economy is as bad in Omaha, or nationally, as 'they' say it is can be debated, but I've noticed a few things in dealing with food and spirits businesses over the last year; As bad as things are, openings of new restaurants and bars still outpace the closings. Doesn't that seem a little off with all the doom and gloom we hear? I try to keep track of those things and I added them all up this time entirely expecting to see the opposite and instead, more opening than closings. HmMMMM.

Which, of course, got me to thinking why that might be? It took me a while but (I can't remember who exactly it was that triggered the thought) it eventually occurred to me that, here in Omaha, there is a huge amount of locally owned and operated restaurants and bars (which we're all very lucky to have). Small business owners, which most of these are, are able to be quicker in making adjustments and decisions which can be particularly valuable in a bad economy (imagine how long it might take an Applebee's to change their purchasing order versus the local diner). As well, when people are out of work and need money, going into business for yourself often becomes an option that might not have been considered when they were happily plugging away at their nine to five.

So, even in a bad economy, hope springs eternal. I think that can be particularly true here in Nebraska. When the chips are down, and things look bleak, is often when people do some of their best work. It's taking that chance that can often galvanize someone to get it done and to truly achieve. I know many of these people that are starting restaurants and bars (and many that have closed their doors as well) and they're a steely bunch. Smart, dedicated and hard-working people that are willing to try something on the strength of their dreams and decisions – even when it looks bleak.

Which, you see, is the same thing we've been doing here at FSM, We've been fortunate enough to assemble a staff of dedicated and hard-working writers, photographers, designers, and, or course, advertisers (it doesn't work without them) that all took a chance when they decided to become part of the magazine. I'm proud to say, that it did look bleak at times, but we got through those times and the once little light at the end of the tunnel has gotten significantly bigger.

Which all goes to say that, here in Omaha, we're often willing to take a chance on a deal that looks good and, when we do, we're in it the whole way. My hat is off to all of you that do it everyday.

FOOD & Spirits

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hey, just wondering if you had any plans to review or visit Ethiopian Restaurant on Leavenworth and 25th. I ate there the other day and thought it was super cool. Here's my "review", so you know sort of what it was like: <http://www.yelp.com/biz/ethiopian-restaurant-omaha>

Erin Grindstaff

Hello...I am the bar manager for red9, a new lounge and live music venue in Lincoln. I have been working with Dan Crowell in the development of a progressive bar business plan that draws inspiration from pre-prohibition times when the bartender was a skilled tradesman with proper tools and a wealth of product knowledge. We are placing an emphasis on fresh ingredients and careful garnish consideration. As opposed to limiting patrons to an obnoxious list of drink options (that stales quickly), we will provide customers with the luxury of having a drink custom made per palate preference. It is the dialog between the staff and patrons (due to lack of product competence and service skills) that has disappeared into the contemporary 'ultra-lounge' cliché.

I would be interested in discussing our philosophy with you further. I am excited to bring an experience, not just products and expensive furniture, to our customers and to the market in general.

Thank you for your time,

Jill Cockson, red9 Bar Manager



NRWI is an organization here in Omaha that seeks to foster an environment of discovery, while providing a venue for intellectual discourse and promoting projects that improve our community and way of life.

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Recycling • Political Opinion • Constitutional Law • Bio Fuels • Immigration • Economics • Omaha City Planning
All forums are held with a non-partisan objective. NRWI strives to help our community as a whole gather quality information to form well-educated and personal opinions on subjects and topics.

FORUM are held the last Sunday of every month beginning at 5:30 p.m. All Forums are free, open to the public and include free dinner and entertainment. Location is subject to change.

Please contact infoNRWI@yahoo.com or (402)813-0005 for any questions.

FOOD *Spirits* EXPERT'S PANEL



DR. JOHN FISCHER

Dr. John Fischer is a member and two-time president of the Omaha Branch of the International Wine & Food Society, past director of the Nebraska chapter of LADV, and the founding member of the Council

Bluffs Branch of the International Wine & Food Society. He teaches a course on matching wine with food at the Institute for the Culinary Arts in Omaha and is the author of the books, "The Evaluation of Wine – A Comprehensive Guide to the Art of Wine Tasting" and "Wine and Food – 101."



MICHAEL DE SMET

Michael De Smet is a Chef who recently moved to Omaha from Portland, Oregon. He has been in the restaurant industry for eight years and holds a culinary degree from Western Culinary Institute in Portland.

Michael was born in Belgium and has grown up in a family with strong European cooking traditions. This ultimately pulled him into the kitchen at a young age where his passion for great food began to develop. He has been working primarily with Italian and French cuisines but approaches all food with a Mediterranean philosophy; fresh, local, seasonal. Michael lives in West Omaha with his wife.



PAUL KAVULAK

Paul's first professional life was spent working in IT. Most recently as the SVP of Enterprise Technology Integration for West Corporation and while this occupied his daylight hours, most of the others were

consumed by an immersion in beer. Not physically – his passion exists in beer and brewing. Prior to starting up Nebraska Brewing Company with his wife, Kim, Paul had been homebrewing for roughly 17 years. This passion formed the basis for a dogged pursuit of perfection in numerous beer styles and beer history. Livin' the dream.



JANET MAR

Janet Mar teaches baking and pastry as well as Culinology courses at the Institute for Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, NE.

Before becoming a culinary instructor, she was a science researcher using molecular biology techniques to study the development of and the disease processes in heart and skeletal muscles at the University of California, San Francisco and the Texas Medical Center. Her move to Omaha prompted her to enter the culinary field, an interest since childhood. Now, she has merged her dual love of the sciences and the culinary arts.



ANN SUMMERS

Ann Summers is a writer, amateur naturalist, mother, and cook. She is the author of two children's nature books and a new book on healthy lunch tips and nutrition called Healthy Lunch, Healthy Mind. She

believes that fresh local food is the best present we can give ourselves and our children.



MICHAEL CAMPBELL

Michael Campbell, owner of Mick's Music & Bar in Omaha, is a singer/songwriter and humorist. His CD Used Without Permission is available in stores, and his weekly essays can be found at PickyMick.blogspot.com.

He is the author of *Are You Going To Eat That?*, a collection of fifty humor essays.



JEREMY HUNTER

Jeremy Hunter has lived off and on in Nebraska for 18 years. He has been in the industry for nearly 20 years. His experience as a food service warrior spans from starting out as a dishwasher to owning his own

pizza restaurant. He has been a part of every aspect of the industry, but loves being a server and bartender above all. When he is not behind the bar or helping customers, he can be found with a nice microbrew and a glass of Grand Marnier.



JOHN LARKIN

John Larkin is co-owner of Jake's Cigars & Spirits in both Omaha and Lincoln. He's been smoking and selling cigars for close to 10 years having begun his

career as a tobacconist right out of high school in Salt Lake City. John moved to Lincoln in 2002 to run Jake's for longtime friend Alex Roskelley. After serving a tour in Iraq with the Army Reserve he came home and bought into the original Jake's in downtown Lincoln. In August 2006 John and Alex opened a new shop in downtown Benson where he now resides with his wife. John spends most of his time smoking cigars while questing after the best beers, bourbons, and wines he can get his hands on.



JOHN FINOCCHIARO

John Finocchiaro is co-owner of Johnson Brothers Finocchiaro, LLC, a Nebraska wholesale wine, spirits, and beer distributor. Formerly the owner of Finocchiaro

Wine Co., Inc., John has been in the wine distribution business for the past 25 years and the Finocchiaro family's association with the Nebraska wine industry has been continuous for the past 73 years, since 1935. John was a Certified Public Accountant before entering the family business and is a Certified Specialist of Wine.



DAN CROWELL

Dan Crowell, cocktail enthusiast and self-avowed 'spirits nerd', is the Luxury Brands Specialist for Sterling Distributing Company in Omaha. He talks

incessantly (even occasionally to other people) about the virtues of what he calls 'investigative imbibement'. An eternally fascinated student of the distillers' art, he encourages any like-minded individuals to engage him in spirited discussion at <http://libationassociation.blogspot.com>.



(with a view)
Dinner **^** is served.



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OMAHA PRESS CLUB

COMINGS & GOINGS

Upcoming food, wine and spirits related area events.

FSMOmaha.com

Our website, www.fsmomaha.com launched in September and it has seen a ton of traffic since then. We recently added a blog section and we invite all our readers to blog away - just email the publisher for more information. Also look for more recipes and articles to be added in the coming weeks.

Gastronomic Fight Club

Gastronomic Fight Club is now an OpenSocial application - this means you can now sign into GFC and become a member of the site using an existing OpenSocial profile, such as your Google, Yahoo or AIM account. Once you are a member of Gastronomic Fight Club, you'll be able to invite friends using your existing address books on other sites and publish activities, such as your restaurant reviews and ratings, to other social networks. Other features are sure to come as well. Find out more at www.gastronomicfightclub.com.

Omaha Press Club

The OPC moved back to their newly renovated home on top of the First National Bank building in September.

Le Voltaire New Year's Dinner

Le Voltaire will hold a New Year's Eve dinner on December 31st. The cost is \$80/person and will include four courses as well as wine.

Chocolate Makes Things Better

On Sunday, January 25th, The Literacy Center will host the 2nd Annual Chocolate Makes Things Better at Elk Ridge Village on the Lake (19303 Seward Plaza, Elkhorn.) From 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm, support the cause of Literacy in our community and sample chocolate-inspired treats from some of the Metro's finest restaurants, bakeries and caterers. The Literacy Center helps hardworking individuals to acquire the practical skills needed to be more active and contributing members in our communities. Tickets in advance are \$25 and \$30 at the door. Call (402) 342-READ (7323) to purchase tickets or for more information.

Celebrity Chef Fundraiser

This is the eighth year that The Food Bank will hold its unique fundraiser, which highlights a celebrity chef who provides a cooking demonstration on stage of at least two recipes. Following the demonstration, the created dishes are then auctioned off in a live auction – with the celebrity chef often times delivering the dishes to the highest bidders. The live auction also includes three art pieces created by children from one or more of The Food Bank's nine Kids Cafes. The cooking demo and the live auction are preceded by cocktails, a silent auction and a book signing event; they are

followed by a sit-down dinner – attendees usually number between 650–750. To learn more about The Food Bank and to get more information on the Celebrity Chef Event, call 402-331-1213 or go to www.omahafoodbank.org.

Roberts Dairy

Roberts Dairy invites you to enter the "Holiday Recipe Contest." Submit your favorite family holiday recipe using Roberts Dairy products - now through December 31, 2008. All recipes must include at least one Roberts Dairy product. The grand prize winner will be chosen at random, and will receive Roberts Dairy products for one year. Visit www.robertsdairy.com to enter online and for complete contest rules.

Spirit World

Spirit World now has regular tastings the first Thursday of every month from 6:00-8:00 p.m. They also hold informal wine tastings every Saturday from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Stop by the store every Saturday where they will be sampling at least 4 wines of interest. Ask questions and learn what you like about wine. This is a great opportunity to try before you buy. \$15 per person includes samples of each item, light hors d'oeuvres, and a 15% discount on items tasted. Walk-ins are welcome, but RSVP's are appreciated.

Spencer's Steaks

Spencer's for Steaks and Chops announced that Clayton Chapman has been named Executive Chef at the premier Omaha steakhouse. Most recently, Chapman was the Chef de Cuisine at V. Mertz Restaurant. He received his training at the Illinois Institute of Art in Culinary Arts and worked at Tru Restaurant, a well-known French restaurant located in Chicago. In addition to his restaurant responsibilities, Chapman teaches local culinary classes at The Classy Gourmet.

The Durham Museum

Exhibit from the Field Museum in Chicago, exploring the ancient and modern uses of the cacao bean, whose dense seed pods and bitter taste been used as food, currency, and more over the past 1,500 years. Begins January 31st - call 402-444-5071 for more information.

Art & Soup

On February 22nd the Visiting Nurse Association will hold the 12th Annual Art & Soup at the Holiday Inn Omaha Convention Center. Over 60 artists and 25 restaurants come together to help VNA provide public health nursing services to children and adults living in Omaha and Council Bluffs homeless shelters. The finest soups are created for this event along with every type of art imaginable to buy. The Patron Party will feature hors d'oeuvres, beverages, and the first opportunity to buy-it-now on the silent auction and meet artists one-on-one. To purchase tickets call (402) 930-4021.

High School Culinary Invitational

The Institute for the Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College is proud to announce the ICA High School Culinary Invitational to be held February 27th & 28th 2009 at the Fort Omaha Campus. The ICA Invitational will showcase the culinary and academic talents of the high school students with in a 100 mile radius. The Invitational will be supported by the students and faculty of Metropolitan Community College and leaders in the Food Service and Hospitality Industry. The highlight of the ICA Invitational will be area's best young people participating in a team competition format in two contests: a Culinary Skills Competition and Hospitality Knowledge Bowl. The competition will help prepare students for other professional culinary competitions, such as ProStart and Skills USA. Student teams can compete locally at the ICA Invitational and continue through the state and national levels of competition.

Lafayette, CO Quaker Oatmeal Festival

If the winter has got you feeling like you must get out of town, head to Lafayette, CO for days of sticky, yummy fun. The festival is January 10th and includes a hot oatmeal breakfast with the world's largest toppings bar. There will also be an oatmeal baking contest with 'fabulous prizes'. Of course, there will also be a health fair which will feature health screenings, interactive stations & special programs. Do those all really go together?

2009 Minnesota Organic Conference & Trade Show

The 9th Annual Minnesota Organic Conference & Trade Show will be held at the Civic Center in St. Cloud, MN on January 16 and 17. Besides the keynote speakers there will be more than 30 breakout sessions on organic production of crops, dairy, livestock, fruits and vegetables, marketing, and many more topics.

Comings

94/95 Sports Grille, Boiler Room (we're hoping!), G & J's Kitchen Southern Cuisine, Barley's Bar and Grill, Union Pizzeria and Sports Bar, La Mesa, Billy's Miracle Hills Café, Freddy's Frozen Custard & Steakburgers, Ryan's Bistro, Shucks Fish House & Oyster Bar (second location), Blue Planet Natural Grill, Julian's Tex Mex Restaurant, Stokes - Legacy (West Omaha Location), Crystal Jade Restaurant, Finicky Frank's, Texas Roadhouse, Worker's Takeout Deli, Blue Sushi (Old Market Location), The Coney Stop, SmokeShack BBQ.

Goings

The Tasting Room, OMai Vietnamese Restaurant, Sweet Georgine's Bake Shop, Colton's Woodfired Grill, Dickey's Barbecue Pit, Jumbo Buffet, Tim's Wood-Oven Pizza, The Pancho's Mexican Grill, Goofy Foot Lodge.

To have your listings, events or activities in Food & Spirits Comings & Goings section contact eriktotten@fsmomaha.com or Call 402-203-6145

24th Street

The Longest Street In the World

by Ryan Brown

Where's the buzz that should be surrounding 24th Street? Where's the "24th Street has a lot to offer", or the "Hey man, have you checked out 24th Street?"

There is a misguided idea that 24th Street is about as irrelevant and forgotten as a road can be. Overlaid with dirt and weeds and grime, boxed and boarded up.

What I am trying to say is, you're wrong Omaha. Actually, there is much to be had on 24 Street. So much that I will go to such great lengths as calling 24th Street the "longest street in the world." From the North O to South O, 24th Street has something for everyone.

"...I will go to such great lengths as calling 24th Street the 'longest street in the world'. From the North O to South O, 24th Street has something for everyone."

Imagine the feeling of swooping down as if from above and picking out the spots worth mentioning. Starting in the North, there's Skeets Ribs and Chicken, a North O institution that defines its own dining experience. Skeets has been around a looong time and their food shows it. As you might guess, they've got great ribs and chicken and it's all served in a no nonsense, get your eat in way. Not to be missed.

Similarly is Southern Boys Cafe. Tucked away right off 24th Street a few blocks south of Lake Street, they feature a few particularly interesting options like a Spicy Red Fish Sandwich, fried okra, pig feet and pig ear sandwiches. The weekends boast local entertainment with live music and dancing.

The International Cafe on 25th and Leavenworth has been open for three years. Like the newly opened Le Kilimanjaro on 26th and Maple, offers simple dishes focusing on the staple flavors of Africa. Notable are the mandazi, which are essentially unglazed, slightly sweet raised donuts; the ambuza, which is a Somalian turnover filled with spiced ground beef and onions that tastes like how you always wished for a

Runza to taste. The restaurant also includes both lamb and goat options, the goat meat being very fatty, kind of like oxtail, and prepared in a way to resemble some of the beef cheek and beef tongue options in Omaha's best taco shops. Both are served alongside African-style spaghetti.

Across the street is a great late-night destination in the landscape of Omaha weekend-ing, rivaling the Donut Stop on 13th just north of the Bohemian Cafe. Smoke Pit BBQ is open until 3 am on Fridays and Saturdays, and offers the usual barbecue fodder of ribs, brisket, pulled pork, and traditional barbecue sides.

Malara's on 21st and Pierce is tucked away in what looks like an old house. The interior is spacious and decorated, playing music you'd expect in a neighborhood-type Italian joint. The food is simple but satisfying, with the nicely textured pasta-wrapped mozzarella sticks as their claim to fame among Omaha locals. I also sampled the braciolo and was impressed by the flavor and the perfect texture that came through in the preparation.

Joe Tess Live Fish Market just south of Q St on 24th has been around Omaha for a long, long time, first beginning as a tavern in the 1930s. We at Food and Spirits like staying power, and apart from the live fish market, you can stop in and grab a fish sandwich or opt for one of the combo dinners of carp, catfish, chicken, shrimp, and oysters, along with the usual fried fish accompaniments.

Finally on the very southern end there is, of course, the wealth of great taco-related options on 24th Street in South Omaha. My particular area favorite is Taqueria Tijuana. Apart from having a diverse menu, the overall preparations seem to be the most fo-

cused, although I would emphasize that each locale does specific things better than others. Regardless, make sure you try the sopas, the tortas, the huaraches, and the tacos made from lengua, cachete, chorizo, and al pastor. You may be in for a surprise, but you just may decide you like it.

While 24th Street has its share of idiosyncrasies and frustrations, the idea that Omaha stretches out in more directions and along more roads than meet the eye is a pursuit well worth putting forth. And, more generally, that there are a number of unique and interesting food options all around us, in every nook and cranny of the city, and that they are worth the effort of being sought out.

24th Street Dining Attractions

Skeets Ribs and Chicken
(2201 N 24th St)

Southern Boys Café
(2414 Patrick Ave)

International Café
(2416 Farnam St)

Smoke Pit BBQ
(230 S 25th St)

Joe Tess Live Fish
(5474 S 24th St)

Malara's
(2123 Pierce St)

Laos Thai Kitchen
(4520 S 24 St)

Taqueria Tijuana
(5139 S 24th St)

Eating Fresh Locally

by Brian Smith

Anyone who has read books by Michael Pollan, Joel Salatin or Barbara Kingsolver has heard the same advice: eat fresh foods grown in your area by local farmers. It is the best way to get tasty, healthy foodstuffs and support the local food economy.

Well, that's all fine and good during July and August, but in Nebraska, we have this thing called "winter." It's cold and snowy. Maybe in Minnesota, the kids play in snowdrifts and skate on frozen ponds, but it's a different story here. We scurry from car to building, cross our fingers and wait for May. The Good Life is on hold.

Meteorologically speaking, Nebraska isn't the worst place to be. (Pity the people in Minot, ND.) Our traditional food growing season pretty much runs April-ish to October-ish, and the farmers markets operate from early May to early October. The changes in seasons bring all sorts of great limited-time-only foods, like morels in May and winter squash in September.

"From greenhouses and hoop houses, to greengrocers and fast food joints, local is now a year round proposition."

If you want to support local farmers and get fresh foods in the frozen months, you're out of luck, right? Well, that's the way it used to be. Thanks to the increasing demand for local foods throughout the year, producers are finding ways to grow and sell the things you want to eat. From greenhouses and hoop houses, to greengrocers and fast food joints, local is now a year round proposition. But where can you find it?

We'll start with fast food, since that's a really strange place to find local food, especially in winter. Runza restaurants started buying tomatoes this summer from Garden Fresh Vegetables in O'Neill. GFV grow their tomatoes hydroponically in greenhouses, so they're available all year. (Yes, hydroponics can be used for growing something local.) When you order your burger with tomato, you're eating a juicy slice of Nebraska.

A quiet addition to Omaha's grocery options is Tomato Tomato. (Singing it: you say tomato, I say to-mah-to.) Located at 156th and West Center Road, Tomato Tomato is a division of Garden Fresh Vegetables, but they offer a retail outlet for many local products that you'd find at a farmers market in better weather. You can browse the selection of greenhouse produce, meat, eggs, cheeses and honey products. Since the people who run the location are involved in agriculture, you can ask questions and get real answers. Imagine that!

If you're a lazy shopper or addicted to the internet, check out the Nebraska Food Co-op. Billed as Nebraska's online, year-round farmers market, it is an exhaustive source of available products (538 items in October). It makes you wonder why you've never heard of these people before, but they're out there. Subscribers can order directly online, and the co-op network gathers food from the farms, sorts the orders and delivers to urban locations. In Omaha, orders are delivered to Jane's Health Market in Benson.

If you're really hardcore about supporting a local farmer and getting the true taste of cool weather crops, Honey Creek Farms in Iowa runs a winter CSA. CSA is community supported agriculture or subscription farming. A member prepays for a weekly delivery of produce, and the transaction is direct between the farmer and the eater. Honey Creek Farms is distinctive in their focus on a winter season instead of the traditional summer CSA. Although they utilize a greenhouse they grow veggies that prefer cool temperatures, especially Asian greens. Want local mizuna? No boring grocery store varieties here.

I would be remiss if I didn't give some credit to the grocery chains. While the majority of their produce comes from California, Mexico, Chile or some other far-off land, they do carry some local goods, it's just harder to find them. Tomatoes from Omaha Red's in Gretna, tomatoes from Garden Fresh Vegetables, onions and herbs from Blooms Organic and other homegrown goodies are among the choices at Whole Foods, Hy-Vee and other markets. It's worth searching them out because it encourages giant corporations to pay attention to people who care enough to grow small-scale crops as a profession.

I admit that I mourn the lack of fresh-from-the-garden tomatoes in February. If you do a taste-test of winter tomato options, you'll probably find that locally produced fruits are the best of the bunch. If you ask nicely, the produce manager might whip out a knife and slice up a few for tasting. Inquire about the sources and find out what the store buys from local sources, when they deliver and if they are considering more crops. It's all about demand, people! If you don't ask for the good stuff, stores will assume that everyone wants cardboard-flavored food.

There you have it. There's no good way to stop yourself from freezing during Nebraska winters, it's part of life. But life can be a little tastier if you know where to look and who to ask. Eat up!



Brian Smith and his wife Kelly operate Black Sheep Farms, a chemical-free family farm near Bennington. He is a speaker and writer on the topic of local food, and he has a minor food addiction. Wanna go to lunch?

An Omaha Classic Reviewed:

Taxi's Grille & Bar

una Nachos
photo by Dave Ahlquist

For Food & Spirits Magazine's quarterly review we hit an Omaha classic at Taxi's Grill & Bar at 120th and Blondo (1822 N 120th Street). Taxi's was opened in 2002 by the original owners of The Neon Goose (also an Omaha classic, considering how much I hear about it). Taxi's has been on my radar for a while, and I had lunch there a few times, but this one the first time I had ventured in for dinner. I've heard great things about the place though (particularly their Sunday brunch) so we were excited to check it out.

the same general format for the review as we explored the weeks and crannies of the food world together. Doing so forced him to learn to appreciate all tastes and textures regardless of his initial impression. He's gone from a person who dislikes fish so much he wouldn't even eat a fish stick to a person who thinks there is no better way to eat fish than a gleaming plate of sashimi. Because food for Derek is about experiencing new things, he's been drawn primarily to fine dining and regional cuisines. Both have great potential for challenging him with dishes he never would have conceived on his own. As for that kid who aspires to be a chef, he's contentedly abandoned that dream. He still cooks occasionally, though not nearly as often as he'd like - but when he does cook, he cooks with reckless abandon.

We notified the restaurant what night would be coming and allowed the restaurant to order some of our meal (and we were able to try some items that will make their way onto the new menu, which is due out after the first of the year. Scores were given in presentation, flavor and an overall score on a scale of one to ten (with ten being the highest). The diners were also asked to identify their favorite (and least favorite) dishes and to tell us a little about themselves and where they are coming from with food. With that, here are your reviewers...

Dawn Pike: Dawn is the Publisher and Editor of Pet Enthusiast magazine. Although she is an avid pet lover, she also enjoys experiencing new cuisines especially each month with a group of girlfriends. The group is entitled GNO (pronounced "Geeno") which stands for Girls Night Out. During these monthly outings, Dawn, her great friend Erin Marr (founder of forAWE.com where GNO was born) and their friends choose a different local restaurant to enjoy friendship, laughter and of course - a full menu of wine and cuisine. Dawn is a steak and potatoes type of chick, although she will entertain the idea of trying seafood dishes even though her palate continues to scream "NO!". She has been able to enjoy a Mahi Mahi dish on occasion however, with her favorite made to perfection at Primo 140.

Kevin Newlin: Right out of high school Kevin started working at an area casual dining restaurant and became a kitchen manager by the time he was 19. Soon after he enrolled in culinary and graduated from the ICA at MCC in 1997 as a chef's apprentice. Since then he has worked at the Offutt Officers club, Field Club of Omaha, Farms and the Omaha Country Club. In 2006 he was named the Executive Chef for the ICA and in 2007 he obtained his Executive Chef certification from the American Culinary Federation.

David Ahlquist: David Ahlquist has lived in the East, South and West in between stints in his native Omaha. He imagines himself a man of many talents and interests, but currently spends his time working as a computer programmer and watching television. Dining out, he tends towards the familiar - a filet, shrimp or the unadorned sandwich (meat, cheese and bread please.) His favorite food is the Philly cheesesteak from Doc's in Atlanta. David's brief vegetarian experiment ended when he realized there wasn't a very exciting menu for someone who dislikes tomatoes, mushrooms and squashes. Soups, frozen entrees, Almond butter and fruit spread on toast make up the bulk of his diet. He occasionally envisions a lifestyle change involving healthier eating with fresh foods prepared in interesting fashions. These daydreams inevitably end with the spoiled food from his impulsive grocery shopping spree in the garage and an ever increasing collection of exotic, unopened condiments and spices in the cupboard.

Derek (aka Sneakse@GastronomicFightClub.com): Derek was a picky eater as a kid. Oddly, he always liked to cook and fancied himself a chef, but his list of acceptable ingredients was fairly short. Meeting the woman he would marry, and moving to California changed all of that. His wife was a budding foodie when he met

her and they explored the weeks and crannies of the food world together. Doing so forced him to learn to appreciate all tastes and textures regardless of his initial impression. He's gone from a person who dislikes fish so much he wouldn't even eat a fish stick to a person who thinks there is no better way to eat fish than a gleaming plate of sashimi. Because food for Derek is about experiencing new things, he's been drawn primarily to fine dining and regional cuisines. Both have great potential for challenging him with dishes he never would have conceived on his own. As for that kid who aspires to be a chef, he's contentedly abandoned that dream. He still cooks occasionally, though not nearly as often as he'd like - but when he does cook, he cooks with reckless abandon.

APPETIZERS

1 Waffle Fries \$6.25

"With gorgonzola cheese and chipotle mayonnaise." These, although seemingly unassuming, were some of everybody's favorites.

Combined Average Presentation Score: 7.5

Combined Average Flavor Score: 8.75

Combined Average Overall Score: 8.5

SELECTED COMMENTS

Derek: Interesting and flavorful. I like the spicy kick from the aioli and the blue cheese is a great touch.

Kevin: These are outstanding. They are came out warm and crunchy. The chipotle mayo is good but a little broken. They could have had a blue cheese sauce and then topped it with crumbles. Overall, very good.

Dawn: Unexpected flavor; very dramatic and unlike any other fried potato dish I've ever tasted. Love it!

Dave: These were awesome.



Waffle Fries
photo by Dave Ahlquist

2 Seared Sea Scallops \$23.95

“Mashed potato, wilted spinach and carrot in a pool of shallot herb cream sauce.”

Combined Average Presentation Score: 7.67

Combined Average Flavor Score: 7.3

Combined Average Overall Score: 7.3

SELECTED COMMENTS

Derek: Scallop slightly overcooked. Possible grit. Sauce is nice, but a little too much sage. Good potatoes. Greens went well with the potatoes.

Kevin: At first glance the plate seems a little crowded. Scallops were a little overcooked but still very good. Shallot sauce is awesome. Cabbage/spinach saute is a nice touch to cut the richness of the scallops and mashed potato.

Dave: I really like the sauce and they were done nearly perfectly done, but not rubbery. I don't know if I just have to put up with them in scallops or if they can do more in prep, but these were a little gritty.



Seared Sea Scallops
photo by David Ahlquist

ENTRÉES

3 Aunt Kay's Pot Roast \$14.95

“Mashed potato and gravy, house vegetable.” This looked exactly like you would expect fantastic pot roast to look like - meat, mashed potatoes and tons of gravy.

Combined Average Presentation Score: 7.5

Combined Average Flavor Score: 7.38

Combined Average Overall Score: 7.5

SELECTED COMMENTS

Derek: The broccoli is cooked well. Great mashed potatoes. A good pot roast. Very good flavor. Some mushiness in texture, but not throughout the whole dish.

Kevin: Good presentation, but it's pot roast and who doesn't like pot roast! This will always be a fan favorite. The potatoes are very good - creamy and most importantly real. The fresh vegetables were a nice touch. If I had to say, the pot roast was a little overcooked.

Dawn: Pot roast was tender. The potatoes were creamy but vegetables did not have a distinct flavor.

Dave: It was good. Salty, beefy gravy and fork-tender meat.

Pot Roast
photo by Dave Ahlquist



4 Beef Medallions

“Nightly special – on a wild rice blend with a brandy peppercorn blue cheese sauce.”

Combined Average Presentation Score: 8.13

Combined Average Flavor Score: 7.63

Combined Average Overall Score: 8

SELECTED COMMENTS

Derek: Not bad. Cooked well with what looks to be a pan sauce. A little mushy, but that's a filet for you. Great blue cheese potatoes. Liked the onions, of course.

Kevin: Good presentation. Peeled asparagus displays the quality for which Taxi's is known. Nice pan sauce. The peppercorn steak could have used some seasonings and a better sear. Good classic combination throughout the dish.

Dawn: Tender and full of flavor. Onion rings are a great complement to the blue cheese mashed potatoes.

Dave: It's hard to go wrong with a great piece of tenderloin, and these didn't disappoint.

5 Chicken Picatta \$15.95

“Grilled chicken breast over rice and steamed broccoli with button and shitake mushrooms, capers, topped with a lemon cream sauce.”

Combined Average Presentation Score: 6.38

Combined Average Flavor Score: 7

Combined Average Overall Score: 7

SELECTED COMMENTS

Derek: The broccoli was overcooked. It smelled really good. Is there anything capers can't improve? I think the rice actually works well with the dish. The mushrooms are good too. One of the better dishes of the night. Only complaint - the chicken was slightly too charred and dry without the mushrooms and capers.

Kevin: Nice presentation! Not a real Picatta, but good nonetheless. Why plain rice? Enhanced starch brings complexity and balance to the whole dish. This dish works. Broccoli cooked perfectly. The mushrooms are a good addition.

Dawn: A little smokier than I anticipated. The chicken was a little dry.

Dave: A little dry and the sauce didn't do it for me.

DESSERTS

We asked our panel to each pick a dessert to review. Goodman – 3 out of the 4 picked the pound cake. We also sampled the Tiramisu, the Napoleon Tart and the Chocolate Brownie.

6 Pound Cake

Buttery, light and fluffy - this one was certainly a crowd pleaser. Served with homemade whipped cream and tasty strawberries.

Combined Average Presentation Score: 7.5

Combined Average Flavor Score: 7.38

Combined Average Overall Score: 7.5

SELECTED COMMENTS

Derek: All the desserts were good. This one was simple but executed well. The warm cake enhanced the sweetness and texture to put this one on top.

Dave: This was fantastic. Warm, smooth, buttery, creamy goodness.

Kevin: This is awesome. Pound cake is timeless. Serving it warm really put this over the top. Very light, fresh and straightforward and excellent! Real whipped cream is essential.

Overall Ratings:

Service: 7.63

Atmosphere: 7.88

Food: 7.88

Price: 7.5

Overall Experience: 8

Derek: It was cold by the window, but that might have been from the door. Always a great place to eat. Interesting food at reasonable prices. Dinner at Taxi's is good, but brunch is their forte.

Kevin: Service seemed slow, but he was trying very hard, which is a plus. Food was good. A self-owned single proprietor is an excellent staple for the Omaha restaurant scene.

Dawn: Taxi's is a wonderful place to catch up with friends in an incredible, quaint atmosphere. The food was amazing, with a sense of coming home. I will be back.

Dave: This is probably the best food top to bottom of any place I've been this year. There were lots of things I liked a lot. I usually find something I like at a restaurant and order it exclusively. I'd have a hard time doing that at Taxi's.



Tiramisu
photo by David Ahlquist

the Comfort of Veggies

by Ann Summer

Are you the sort of eater who can plow through fresh tomatoes for breakfast, a bunch of radishes (salt only) and a nuked beet (salt and lemon juice) for lunch, and grilled squash and eggplant (salt, lemon and olive oil) for dinner, with maybe some pickled cuke for dessert? If so, you'd be like me. But if all that sounds a bit too vegetarian for you, then you'd be like the rest of my family. They like their veggies, but only sort of, and not too many.

Great, I say; work with what you have. So while I crunch away on raw spinach for lunch, I make comfort veggies for my family's dinner. My kids don't adore green beans, but stir fried til just tender and dressed with a bit of soy sauce, garlic, sesame seed, and brown sugar, they love them and they make a great side to almost anything. Carrots can be done the same way and instead of garlic and sesame, I use the soy/sugar

to dress at the end with a little ginger. Broil some half-sliced brussel sprouts dressed in

olive oil and seasoned with salt and pepper and just a little lemon juice, and people who don't like them might actually eat them. Do the same thing with beets or sweet potatoes (peel them first) and cut them up into chunks, and cook them on a tray like the brussels and the results can be met with surprising approval. I'm not saying you should force people to choke down strange veggies they would normally never touch, but it is good to explore a little. Make friends with the veg, and good things can happen.

Seriously, there is no need to be sneaky about it. And I believe that kids who know food grow to love food. Not everyone can love a turnip, but just about anyone can eat a pizza. Make your own dough (2 cups flour, dash salt, 2/3 cup water, dash oil, pack

Potatoes are not nutritionally embarrassing in the least when treated properly.

of yeast) and rise it in the fridge overnight. Adorn with fresh basil and cherry tomatoes from your garden, fresh mozzarella, or whatever your family likes. Too complicated?

When I was little, my Dad made cheese toast with very thin tomato slices and broiled them, tomato on top, cheddar under. The tomato caramelized over the melted cheese. With sourdough bread, goat or sharp cheddar cheese and local hot house tomatoes, this can be an elegant snack or half a meal.

Summer or fall salads are another way to make tempting veggies. A good coleslaw is easy and my kids love it. Buy a real cabbage from the market, in whatever color you like. Peel and quarter it and shred it in the food pro, or if you don't have that, thinly slice down through your quarters until you have thin strips or julienne of cabbage. I actually prefer the texture of the strips, especially if it won't be eaten right away, the texture doesn't turn mushy. (You need a long chef's knife for this, and most other big kitchen tasks. Do try this at home, but not with a paring knife, or you'll be there all day.) Don't despair about the right way to make slaw; make one your family will eat. Onion



Carrot? Pickle? Shred or chop small. Jicama radish, even apple is fine—anything with low moisture content. Dressing is easy. The French basic recipe is a bit of whole heavy cream with salt and pepper and a dash of lemon juice. Use mayo, or sour cream, or your favorite creamy salad dressing. Start small so you know when you've put enough dressing. It takes surprisingly little. When you've got lots of corn, tomatoes, and zucchini, and you've run out of ways to fix them, chop them together in a fresh corn salad with some onion and a little fresh basil. Olive oil and cider vinegar are all you need beyond salt and pepper. For fall, put any of these veggies with a little bell pepper and some cooked beans (black, white, pinto) and dress the same way. These salads can be served at room temp, cold, or even just warm, and they go with anything you can poach or grill.

Potatoes may have been tainted in our minds by all their mistreatment in processed and fast (read fat) foods, but they are actually a vegetable of noble standing, and are not nutritionally embarrassing in the least

When eaten properly, Creamy little farm fresh potatoes? What can't you do with those? Get the waxy kind with red or yellow skins from an organic or local source. If you have time, slice them thinly and put into a casserole with a little butter, salt, pepper, and cream and bake low and slow for a perfect gratin. If you're in a hurry, wash (I never peel) and quarter them, then toss with olive oil, lemon juice and some chopped



rosemary or thyme, and broil them on a tray. Or do a quick mash by boiling whole, draining, and mash with a potato masher with a small clove of grated garlic, a little butter and some milk. If you want to do a potato salad, try the German one we like. Boil your little potatoes and drain. Fry some bacon (try some heirloom Berkshire bacon with no sulphites and no added water from

the local coop), lower the heat and the leftover grease, stir in some chopped green onion, then deglaze with a little cider vinegar and brown sugar. Then half or quarter the potatoes and pour the vinegar dressing over them while everything is still warm. Garnish with cooked bacon. It is interesting to note that many European recipes for veggies contain butter, cream, or yes, even bacon. Nevertheless, they are eating their veggies, made from scratch, and what the heck, aren't they supposed to taste good?

One more comfort veggie (broccoli) dish I make for my family is quiche.

One more comfort veggie dish I make for my family is quiche. Strangely, my children are fond of broccoli, which is complemented well by cheese. There is no need for meat here, but a bit of diced smoked pork or ham would be fine. Beat some eggs (about 3 per person) and add a quarter cup of milk for each person (or every three eggs). Then sprinkle in some grated cheese (you can use pre-grated, if you like) and half a diced onion, some broccoli (I parboil it while I do everything else by just pouring boiling water

over and letting it sit, then drain.) or frozen peas (do the same thing with the boiling water in a bowl to thaw them) or chopped asparagus, or zucchini or spinach, or whatever. Then pour into a greased casserole and bake at 375 for 15-30 minutes (depending on how thick the mixture is—for faster cooking, use a wider shallow pan) until firm through and brown on top. It's a comfort veggie, but it's still a veggie.

I recommend local produce whenever possible, or an organic option that doesn't come from too far away. Check your Nebraska food coop, and your supermarket, but don't settle for something that looks like it was bred for mass transport, it will probably taste like the cardboard it is meant to hold up as well as. Explore a little, and stop steaming things for a change. Put a little comfort into your veggies.



Ann Summers is a writer, amateur naturalist, mother and cook. She is the author of two children's nature books and a new book on healthy lunch tips and nutrition called Healthy Lunch, Healthy Mind. She believes that fresh local food is the best present we can give ourselves and our children.

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I WANT SOME TAQUITOS!

by Ryan Brown

From childhood, learning to ride a bicycle with training wheels in the driveway, parallel parking with pops in an empty parking lot. Eating spaghetti and the Twirling Fork. And Tacos. Tacos!

We all encounter them in different ways, from T-Bell on a Sunday afternoon, hurrying home to watch the football game on television, to a Tijuana street corner on a day-trip from San Diego, to Hans Moleman turning to Abe Simpson at a town meeting shouting, "I want some taquitos!" Taco fodder is ubiquitous, and for good reason.

Perhaps you are "supposed" to be enraptured by this special sandwich of sorts, and all children, at some point in their respective developments, glow with delight as they learn to crick their necks and crunch off a bite of their first vertical sandwich.

For some like me, the excitement only grows. From tacos and burritos to tortas, gorditas, sopas, huaraches. To made to order taquitos in the southern part of town like flying saucers, carne asada tacos, California burritos (and breakfast! And shrimp!), and, finally, Baja fish tacos.

Here in the comfort of my hometown, it catches me with surprise to realize how many new experiences I can still have in the wide world of tacos.

I remember my first experience walking into a local chain made-to-order joint in San Diego, Santanas. My first time being served corn tortillas by default. Their staple salsa bar with verde and arbor, the jalapeno marinated carrots and potatoes, the fiery radishes. I encountered so many things so quickly, I was almost dizzy with the newness.

And now here in the comfort of my hometown, it catches me with surprise to realize how many new experiences I can still have in the wide world of tacos. A dive taco shop in a little strip mall catches my eye like a beautiful woman. Yet another adventure on 24th Street, sifting through the endless restaurants and trading through the material refuse in their copious thrift stores. There is much to be discovered.

Such are the cultural elements that shy people stay away at the door. Realizing that Cachete = cheek. Lengua = tongue. Al Pastor = marinated pork. Chorizo = sausage. Machaca = beef jerky (twice-cooked). Suadero = smooth brisket. Tripe = stomach lining. Ojo = eyes. I don't know if you feel more adventurous when

it is just a foreign meat with a Spanish name or when you know exactly what it is. Is this a barrier or an entryway?

I don't know the answer, but I know that for me, the excitement grows with each new discovery. An excuse to make tacos a big deal again, like when you were a kid discovering them. But adventure awaits, and I would say that you should learn the rest by yourself. Travel down to South Omaha or stop in at a hole-in-the-wall taco joint that looks promising. For me it's a lunch date every week I call Taco Tuesday. Hope to see you there.

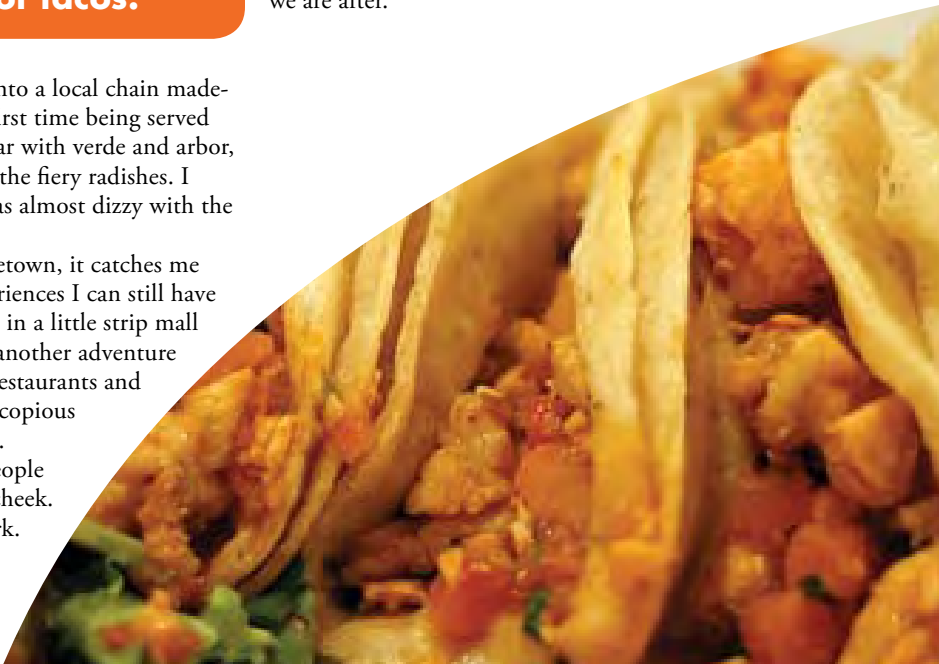
My constructive advice:

Go Mexico city style, steamed corn tortillas double-wrapped, finely chopped onion, cilantro, and an assertive squeeze of the lime wedge with a little salsa of your choice.

Save the enchi recipes for home, enchis are great but enchis = Mexican casserole (comfort food). Not to mention making your own enchi sauce (molé!) will be a rewarding experience.

Cabeza, or head, yields a number of cuts, the most common being the tongue and the cheek. They are wonderfully fatty and have an almost sweetbread texture. Chorizo should be dry and not fast-food-taco greasy, and, in tacos, all meats should be cooked to some degree of crispness. The texture matters.

Tex-Mex has its place. All slathered up. However, if the rice and beans are not worth eating on their own merit and are just on the plate as filler, get the hell out of there. Attention to detail is what we are after.



adita/Papusa

onal method of preparing thick tortilla filled with beans, se, and meat and topped with a spicy slaw.

oes

grilled flatbread often topped with beans, cheese, sour m, red or green sauce, onions and meat -similar to a gyro.

ta

ican sandwich commonly with ham and served up with a of the fixin's, depends wildely on the quality of bread for rall success.

ying Saucer

ried beans, guacamole, sour cream, tomatoes, and cheese a crispy fried tortilla.

carne Asada Fries

guacamole, cheese, carne asada, best nachos ever. Can you y game day?

autas

ne more commonly known taquito -crispy rolled tacos usually served in threes and with a heaping spoon of guacamole.

aja Fish Tacos

crispy fried tilapia or grilled meaty mahi, mayo-milk sauce or spicy chipotle aioli, black/white bean puree, red cabboage, avocado, tomato and sweet corn.

Recommendations to get started:

48th & Q

Favorite overall tacos, al pastor served with thin slices of pineapple, huaraches that are intimidating to say the least.

Corta Del Sol

Great tacos, great crispy tex-mex-essqe platters (they really take their time), papusas topped with a beautiful spicy slaw, and a delicious dessert of a crispy fried plaintain empenada filled with a whipped cream/custard concoction.

Tacqueria Tijuana

Diverse and balanced menu, great introduction to the wonders of South Omaha and worthy of repeat visits.

Los Portales

Tripe, nopales (cactus) and quail? They also feature similar South Omaha staples such as veal milanese tortas and very affordable prices.

Guaca Maya

Made to order or an excellent and extremely friendly lunch buffet. The scents of stockyards on the way down only adds to the romance.

I'll go to my grave arguing that baja fish tacos are the highest of all art-forms in any Mex-latin am cookery. From the outset, the choice between, say, crispy fried tilapia and grilled meaty mahi (mah); whether to go rather straight with a mayo-milk sauce or up the ante with a spicy chipotle aioli; before even arising at the possibility of an elegant black or white bean puree, and finishing with crisp white or red cabbage, avocado, and perhaps chunks of tomato or kernels of sweet corn...

Shrimp Burrito

Shrimp, cole slaw, and rice, goes wonderfully with a nice horchata made from rice milk, cinnamon and sugar.

California Burrito

Carne asada, french fries, cheese and perhaps some guacamole slathered with the hottest sauce available.

Hurache

Crispy Mexican thin-crust pizza, tostada, etc., topped with meat or fried egg and a combination of cabbage, cheese, sour cream, beans and salsa or ranchero sauces.

Salsa Verde

Tomatillos, jalapenos, cilantro, liime juice.

Salsa Arbor

Arbor chile (habanero), and tomato puree -imports a nice smokey flavor.

Menudo

Tripe and hominy soup, slow cooked and generally only available on weekends.

Seven Seas

A tomato broth-based soup with a combination of cubed white-fish, shrimp, scallops, crab, lobster, mussels and clams.

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Home Made Mallows

by Janet Mar

Hot sugar syrup, sticky gelatin and a moving whisk...the stuff of nightmares for beginning culinary students. Why risk burning your hands, splattering hot sugar all over the workstation and making a gooey mess? Because that won't happen and because you'll end up with moist, tender and pillowy puffs called marshmallows. Overcome your fear. There is nothing tricky or risky about making them; all it takes is proper mise en place. In principle, the mixture is no more than an Italian meringue stabilized by the addition of gelatin. You can tint them to any color and flavor them to suit your mood. Dress them up by coating them with chocolate or chopped nuts, put them on lollipop sticks or cut them into different shapes and you have your signature confection. They are worth the effort and are so much better than store bought. Once you make your first batch of these delicious, impossibly soft and squishy marshmallows, you will not go back to those commercial ones. There is no comparison.



INGREDIENTS

Marshmallows

Recipe from Professional Pastry Chef, Bo Friberg

Yield: Half a Hotel Pan (12 x 20")

Gelatin	3 tbsp	
Cold Water	1/2 cup	
Granulated Sugar	1 lb	
Corn Syrup	2 oz	
Water	1/2 cup	
Egg Whites	1/2 cup	
Cornstarch		
Powdered Sugar		Mix at a 1:1 ratio



MEP

What You'll Need

- Hotel Pan (12 x 20" pan)
- Parchment & Pan Spray
- Saucepan
- Electric Mixer w/Bowl
- Oil
- Chef Knife/Scissors

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1

Prep the Pan

Pan spray the hotel pan and line pan bottom with parchment and dust with cornstarch and sugar mix.

STEP 2**Bloom the Gelatin**

In 1/2 cup of cold water, bloom the gelatin. When completely bloomed, heat to dissolve the gelatin then set aside and keep warm.

STEP 3**Make the Syrup**

In a heavy bottom stainless steel saucepan, combine granulated sugar, corn syrup and a second 1/2 cup of water and cook over medium heat. Meanwhile...

STEP 4**Whip the Egg Whites**

Place egg whites in bowl of mixer and with the whip attachment start whipping at medium speed to stiff peaks. Reduce mixer speed to low when sugar has reached 245 degrees F.

STEP 5**Make the Meringue**

Pour the hot syrup carefully and slowly into the whipping egg whites, pouring between the whip and the side of the bowl. Immediately add the dissolved gelatin and turn mixer speed to high.

STEP 6**Pour the Meringue**

When the meringue is smooth and fluffy but still warm, pour it into the prepared pan, spreading to even the top. Mix in color and flavoring before pouring into the pan. Store at room temp until cool.

STEP 7**Cut and Coat**

When cooled and set, cut the marshmallows into desired shape with a lightly oiled chef knife or scissors. Immediately coat in the cornstarch & powdered-sugar mix. Dust off excess coating and serve.



Marshmallows may be made with or without egg whites. After several batches, I have decided that I prefer to make them with egg whites because they are much more moist and fluffy.

Omaha's Thunderbird Salad

– Finding Its Way Into The Mainstream

by Steve Villamonte

The Thunderbird Salad dates back to the 1960's when Executive Chef Luis Villamonte at the Happy Hollow country club served the salad to his patrons. Peruvian-born chef Luis Villamonte created the recipe to be what fans of the salad know today. The salad obviously does not hold the same mystic powers as the great Indian folklore, but for many it holds the distinction of being upper crust. Because of this status the salad made its way to most of the Omaha area's private clubs through working associates of Villamonte.

Chef Luis Villamonte left his Thunderbird footprint at several clubs throughout the Midwest. When he moved to a new club as the executive chef, he would rewrite the menu to include his Thunderbird Salad as the new house salad. This would normally be a difficult task since most clubs have house salads that are ingrained into the tradition of the club. To change the house salad to something no one had ever heard of should have been almost impossible. Once the member tasted the salad the change was not just accepted but was welcomed.

"Peruvian born chef Luis Villamonte created the recipe to be what fans of the salad all know today."

When I recently Googled the salad, I was reminded of my time growing up working for my father at the different clubs where it remains on the menus today. I have fond early childhood memories of preparing the old style plastic pantry glove, while assembling the salad for orders, at Happy Hollow Country Club. Like other fine foods traditionally served only in country clubs, the Thunderbird Salad is now making its way to the mainstream restaurant.

It was my first large party that gave me the idea to trademark my father's salad. A bride hired me for a large wedding of 600, because she knew I had the Thunderbird Salad. That night I could not wait to get the process started for the trademark. At that time, I would have been very discouraged if I had known it would be almost five years later before I had the trademark approved. Once trademarked, I had a regional manufacturer produce and bottle the dressing for retail and commercial sales. I decided I wanted more control by making the dressing myself so I purchased a \$10,000.00 bottler, and a commercial building to do the manufacturing. Along with the Thunderbird dressing, I also manufacture a Blackstone Reuben dressing (for use on the Reuben sandwich), and Nebraska Cobb salad dressing. The Reuben sandwich also has Omaha roots, as it was invented at the Blackstone Hotel many years ago. Originally I delivered and stocked the shelves myself and found it was really a time consuming chore. Brenmar, a large retail food service product distributor, recently took over the distribution of all three products. Because of this, the dressing has made across the state and to some Kansas City HyVee stores. I frequently receive calls from around the country and Canada from Thunderbird Salad fans, wishing to get the product mailed to them, especially during the holidays. On the commercial side Pegler Sysco sells the product in two-gallon cases to Nebraska restaurants. A recent audit of the account revealed about 100 accounts that purchase the dressing. Considering the makeup of the salad I was surprised to see a good portion of the accounts were

healthcare.

When someone has the idea they are going to take a family recipe and make millions, they quickly learn the process is lengthy, tedious and not realistic. I have been on this project for almost ten years and still feel at times, like I am in the infant stage.

What is the Thunderbird Salad? People who have not had a Thunderbird Salad always ask the same question. What other salad would you compare it to? It is not just the dressing but the composition of the ingredients (tomato, chives, bacon, mozzarella and blue cheese), along with the dressing that make it the hearty concoction I always say there is nothing similar and you just have to try it. I have incorporated that same concept into a Thunderbird burger, Thunderbird wrap, Thunderbird potato, and Thunderbird soup. I have visions of opening a quick casual franchise called Thunderbird



The Original Thunderbird Salad

(Makes 4 Servings)

Iceberg & Romaine Lettuce	4 cups
Chives	2 tbsps
Chopped Bacon	2 tbsps
Shredded Mozzarella	1/4 cup
Blue Cheese	1 tbsps
Diced Tomato	1/2 cup

Toss all ingredients together with 3 oz. of Thunderbird Salad Dressing. Top with diced avocado and croutons (optional).

café that will focus on the Thunderbird concept with oversized salads, sandwiches and more.

Perhaps the Indian folklore name referring to its great size is fitting for Omaha's favorite's salad. Lunch at the Omaha Press Club is a busy setting. The most popular item on the menu is the Thunderbird Salad as the entrée. Many diners order it topped with garlic sautéed shrimp, scallops, grilled salmon, or chicken breast. The composition of all the ingredients together creates a complete meal.



Steve Villamonte is a certified executive chef working as the executive director of the Omaha Press Club. Steve owns Villamonte's Cuisine; an upscale catering operation which also manufactures the Thunderbird Salad dressing.

FOOD SERVICE WARRIOR

ON THE LINE BEHIND THE SCENES

by Jeremy Hunter



How many people that have never worked in the kitchen think they have what it takes? I am going to guess maybe 1 out of 10 people actually do. There are a lot of misconceptions about working in a kitchen. People think it's a brainless profession, or they just wanted an easy job. This is definitely not the case. The back of the house is a totally different breed. There are certain skills that are

organize, communicate, and achieve the task at hand. For example—the chef will give the prep cook a list of items that need to be completed before the end of the shift. A good cook is going to know what needs to be done first and what takes the longest. They will prioritize and group the list to be the most efficient

show up early and stay late. They motivate and criticize. And most important they are the bridge between the front and the back. I have heard a lot of cooks say that they could do the managers job. WRONG. It is not an easy job. I would say that a chef has about 15-20 things running through their head at any given time. That is besides the 25 tickets they are trying to orchestrate. A chef is there when you need them and when you're not looking they are usually putting together orders for the next day or coding invoices from the past week. They write the schedule figure out labor costs, all while thinking what they are running for specials. They are selfless and arrogant and for a good reason. They earned it.

In conclusion the kitchen is a well oiled machine. If one component is not working properly the whole thing can break down. Teamwork is a must and if you do not have it be prepared for one of the most frustrating and trying jobs around. When it works it is one of the most entertaining and fun jobs I can think of. There is nothing more rewarding than working a busy shift and knowing you did your best and it worked.

“On the line it is fast paced and there is very little room for mistakes. It is definitely the battlefield.”

needed and a lot of people don't realize it. Cooking is an art. It takes loyalty, perseverance, organization, speed, consistency, and most of all pride.

Let's start with the start with the dishwashers. Most people in the restaurant industry will agree that this is the hardest and most under appreciated job in the place. They show up to work and are immediately confronted with a stack of dishes that have been sitting out all night and piled to the ceiling. They are expected to take out the trash, dump grease traps, scrub floors and walls, sweep the outside all while running nonstop loads through the dishwasher that runs at about 180 degrees per load. Not to

and timely. Basically when you get your work done you get to go home. They also have a good grasp on procedures and the recipes. Bottom line is that they are smart, organized, and cost efficient when it comes to production. After you learn this you are ready to be a line cook.

Starting out on the line is a nerve racking position. You are learning a whole new side of things that you did not have to understand being in the prep kitchen or the dish room. On the line it is fast paced and there is very little room for mistakes. It is definitely the battlefield. You have to work with a number of people calling out orders, asking questions, and commanding the need

“There's nothing more rewarding than knowing you did your best and it worked.”

mention spraying off all the plates and pans leaving you a hot, sweaty, soaking wet mess. Most realize that this is where you decide if you really want to do this as a profession. If you can make it through this you can probably make it in the business.

When you go to your favorite place do you think of who prepares the food for the line cooks to cook? They are the prep cooks. These are people who have showed exceptional skills being able to multitask,

to go faster and work cleaner. You better have good multitasking skill also because if you can only do one thing at a time you will not make it! As a line cook you have to be a team player and have good communication skills. This is where you will test all your senses. Touch, smell, taste, listening, and communication are all necessary to be successful on the line.

Last but not least is the Chef. This is the person who is in charge of the team. They

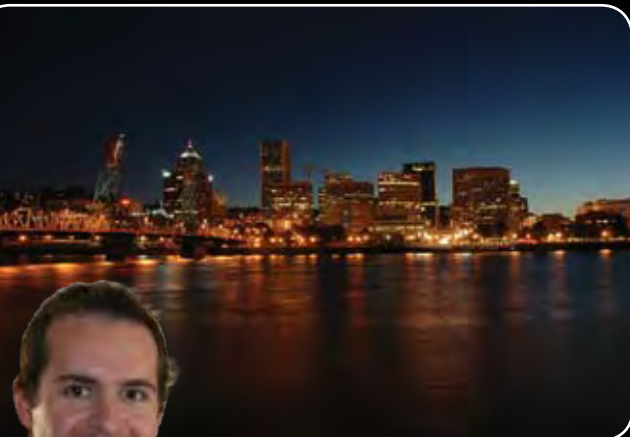


Jeremy Hunter has lived off and on in Nebraska for 18 years. He has been in the industry for nearly 20 years. His experience as a food service warrior spans from starting out as a dishwasher to owning

his own pizza restaurant. He has been a part of every aspect of the industry, but loves being a server and bartender above all. When he is not behind the bar or helping customers, he can be found with a nice microbrew and a glass of Grand Marnier

Outside Looking In

by Michael De Smet



Michael De Smet is a Chef who recently moved to Omaha from Portland, Oregon. He has been in the restaurant industry for eight years and holds a culinary degree from Western Culinary Institute in Portland. Michael was born in Belgium and has grown up in a family with strong European cooking traditions. This ultimately pulled him into the kitchen at a young age where his passion for great food began to develop. He has been working primarily with Italian and French cuisines but approaches all food with a Mediterranean philosophy, fresh, local, seasonal. Michael lives in West Omaha with his wife.

Outside Looking In

I confess: I was hesitant leaving Portland for Omaha. When the big moving day finally arrived, the experience was solidified when my wife and I packed all our belongings onto a moving truck and began psyching ourselves up for that two day drive half way across the country. Most of this stems from becoming comfortable in an environment where I had been for five years, and my lack of knowledge about Omaha. Leaving an area known for its agricultural bounty and seafood, namely salmon, for an area famous for beef and corn (and rightly so) was daunting. This being said, I knew Omaha had more to offer, and I firmly believed that this major move would be a catalyst for great things. Being a Chef, the way I learn new things about certain cities is through researching its restaurants and local farms, markets and simply talking with as

many people who live in the area as possible. This has proved invaluable so far in Omaha. From an outsiders perspective Omaha is developing an excitement for great food and everything that comes with it. This growing

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awareness towards our food ultimately connects Omaha with Portland, even though they are nearly two thousand miles apart.

Omaha’s Heritage and Bounty

Omaha is a Great Plains pioneer town, with Midwestern values and a strong sense of community. It established itself with farming and cattle raising in the early 20th century and as the city has grown so has the support

of local suppliers and restaurants. With the rich tradition of Omaha Steaks around since 1917, many top notch Steakhouses have enjoyed years of success. There is also a wide array of other restaurants; in the Old Market alone one can find high end contemporary American, French, Italian, and Indian cuisines to name a few. With its cobblestone streets the Old Market has the feel and warmth of a European city. All of this adds to a wealth of cultural heritage established around food. I think it is important to note how remarkable it is to have a community that enjoys good food so much. This goes a long way towards strengthening the relationships between consumers and local suppliers. It is, above all a respect for food and the farmers dedicated to making it available. They are truly the stewards of our land. This is what I loved about Portland and what I am growing to love about Omaha.

Food in Our Lives

In a way, cities mirror their restaurants. Typical menus are constantly evolving from season to season with what is fresh, while new cooking techniques and equipment always makes us strive for the “perfect balance” in a dish. Similarly, a community evolves with its consumer education. Learning about locality, seasonality and sustainability is an evolving process too. Many times consumers don’t change what they buy until they are educated as to why they should change what they buy. Since we the consumers ultimately drive the market, our demand can change a large percentage

What is available. When people know more about their food, it opens up a myriad of product choices- why not buy the yellow randywine, or green zebra heirloom tomato at your local farmers market instead of your usual chalky pink hybrid tomato. The flavor profiles with the heirlooms are outstanding and they will become the highlight of any meal. These heirloom varieties open that window to the past and bring back diversity in agriculture that has been diminished since the growth of industrialization.

“Portland is a very forward thinking town regarding sustainable, local food, and Nebraskans are becoming more aware of their food choices, realizing that food is not just an answer to hunger. Consumer choices affect not just our bodies but also our community.”

“You are what you eat eats.” This statement by Michael Pollan in Omnivores Dilemma was powerful in it’s meaning, and rang true with me. What are we feeding our animals and crops? Could their diets potentially affect our well being? Absolutely. Portland is a very forward thinking town regarding sustainable, local food, and Nebraskans are becoming more aware of their food choices, realizing that food is not just an answer to hunger. Consumer choices affect not just our bodies but also our community and environment. Two great resources I have found for Omaha and Nebraska are the Nebraska Food Coop and Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society. Both of them offer many links to learn more about local food, and the farmers producing it. Their efforts prove that there is a demand for sustainable and local. There are many benefits as a result of this demand. A local philosophy strengthens all facets of a community: 1. Regional economies become more prosperous when the support of local farmers keeps money in the community and ultimately creates job growth. 2. High quality, fresh food and, if bought at the farmers market, we are able to give direct feedback to the farmer. 3. Environmental protection- local food cuts greenhouse gas emissions, and protects regional farmland

from development, while promoting biodiversity.

Settling In

As my first month in Omaha comes to a close and the weather shifts towards winter, my thoughts drift to the upcoming holidays and the great amounts of food I will be cooking and consuming with friends and family. These feasts, with intoxicating aromas of roasting birds and sweet spices of pies reminds me that food brings out the best in people and creates a bond which can be seen every time we gather, whether at home or

in a restaurant, in Portland or in Omaha.



Michael De Smet is a Chef who recently moved to Omaha from Portland, Oregon. He has been in the restaurant industry for eight years and holds a culinary degree from Western Culinary Institute in Portland.

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RESOURCES

Beyond the Ordinary

by Dennis Hatchett



Being the president of one of the largest local food service distribution companies means that I am often asked about the industry and economy by colleagues, customers and consumers. All you have to do tune into Hell's Kitchen, The Next Food Network Star or Top Chef to see just how 'che' the foodservice industry has become. Most of us closely involved in the industry are as skillfull at forecasting economic trends as we are at predicting the next great food trend. Environmentally conscious ingredients, highly specialized concepts, and tech-savvy restaurant practices are just a few of the current "food fashions". However, in this ever-changing industry, anticipating what is around the corner is invaluable. Even more, we have to make available what customers are going to need in order to manage those future trends.

Over the past several years, we've seen an increase in take-out concepts and supermarkets offering take-home suppers negatively impact on-premise dining. So, how does a typical restaurant owner maintain profitability in such turbulent economic times? It is the art and science of marrying dynamic business practices with creative solutions that will ensure the success of the contemporary restaurateur. We refer to it as business development. And critical to developing the business is focusing on having just what the customer needs. At U.S. Foodservice, the focus is on providing Resources Beyond the Ordinary."

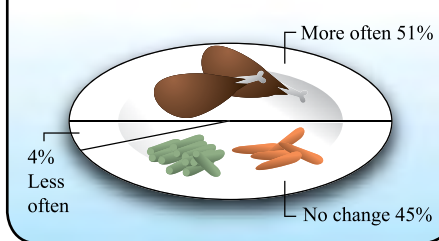
New to the Midwest market is a business development team of food service professionals with over 50 years of industry experience. This team in Omaha is highly skilled at building food-related businesses through the implementation of value-added services, identification of unique market opportunities, and placement of the very best products. They are Tamara Catron, Kristi Pete and Julie Seminara. This dynamic trio is equipped with the vast quantity of

resources to simultaneously improve the customer dining experience and proprietor profitability. "Resources Beyond the Ordinary" is just one of the three pillars

earning lasting loyalty requires more than just selling and delivering products. Companies are now judged like people – not only by what they do, but how they do it."

Often restaurants do not realize the menu is not only their primary marketing tool, but a key component in driving profitability. U.S. Foodservice's Omaha business development team is armed with the know-how to overhaul a restaurant menu. Through perfect layout, design, engineering and printing, this team turns a "good" menu into a great and profitable one. If the menu is the primary marketing tool, then the server is the front line sales person. Tamara, Kristi, and Julie not only provide server training, but educational system and tools that improve the profitability of the restaurant and ultimately the paychecks of the wait staff. Jim Trebbien, Dean/Executive Director of the Institute for the Culinary Arts of the Metropolitan Community College,

During the past three months,
did your household eat dinner at home more or less?



in the recently launched U.S. Foodservice promise to customers: We are "Your partner beyond the plate."™ Bob Aiken, U.S. Food service President & CEO mentions, "In today's increasingly competitive marketplace,



Tamara Catron, Kristi Pete and Julie Seminara Photo taken at Upstream restaurant

marks, "Restaurants need the importance of great servers. I can't tell you how often I have been in restaurants and never been offered an appetizer or dessert." The fact is that most independent restaurant owners do not have the capacity and skill to provide the same level of training as some of the more popular and competitive restaurant chains. In a fast-paced world of instant messaging, e-mails, and iPods, restaurant owners need solutions that appeal to Gen Y employees and customers. This business development team provides a suite of e-solutions that can help with everything from web development to e-marketing to e-commerce placement to on-line/invitation ordering.

If you want U.S. Foodservice to be "Your partner beyond the plate", or to learn more about U.S. Foodservice's new program, visit www.omaha.usfoodservice.com or call The Omaha Foodservice Business Development Team at 402.537.3178.



Dennis Hatchett, President Omaha Division - U.S. Foodservice
Dennis Hatchett is one of only 79 division presidents responsible for overseeing operations at the local level for U.S. Foodservice. Hatchett successfully completed the company's Executive Vice President Leadership (EVP) Program in the fall

of 2007. Hatchett began his U.S. Foodservice career in 2005 as the executive vice president for the Atlanta division. Hatchett holds an MBA from Georgia State University, and a bachelor of science in engineering from North Carolina State University.

the OMAHA Restaurant Association; like an old friend...

by David M. Mainelli

Walk into any restaurant here in Omaha, and you will probably experience the same sentimental condition wherever you go. A smiling greeter with a Midwestern flare will ask, "How are you tonight?" and actually mean it; a waitress may walk by and give you a smile or pat your child on the head; and the manager or owner may walk over and thank you for making the choice to dine in their establishment. The mixed aroma in the air will be a little like when you were a child and went over to your grandmother's house in the wintertime, where something was always baking or dinner was already cooking. There is nothing pretentious about dining in Omaha, and restaurants know it is a simple formula to success. Good food plus good service, at fair prices - it's the Omaha way.

The relationship between a diner and a restaurant is one of trust, where bartenders and

wait staff are licensed to actually be themselves (because their selves are better than anything a restaurant manager could come up with) and chefs and cooks treat every dish as if it is for their own mother. In Omaha, those who work in the restaurants are your neighbors, your friend's kid, your fellow church or synagogue members, and your friends. They truly want you to enjoy your experience and do everything in their power to make sure that it is an absolute rather than a rare occurrence.

There is another relationship that a restaurant keeps here in Omaha that is just as important and that the public doesn't know a lot about. The one it has with the Omaha Restaurant Association. You may recognize an ORA sticker if someone pointed it out to you hanging in the window at one of the many restaurants here in town, but probably do not know much behind it or even care to try. But believe it or not, there is a difference between eating at a restaurant in the Omaha Restaurant Association and one that is not.

For the restaurant, it's like having an old friend who is always there for them when they need them. For over sixty years, the ORA keeps restaurants informed on government issues that may affect their business, new trends on dining out, and gives help with marketing and doing

business. They work with restaurants to reach out to the community and acts as a large, unequivocal and unified voice when these local small businesses need one.

For the community of Omaha itself, the ORA supports the Pro-Start program in Omaha schools for future chefs and restaurant owners, opening yet another path in life for our local area students; they support Metro Community College's 'Institute for the Culinary Arts' with scholarships for college students already following their dreams and learning their trade; and most importantly, they put to use their power of many, by fighting hunger right here in Omaha through Share our Strength's 'Taste of the Nation,' and the ORA's own event, 'Too Many Cooks in The Kitchen.' These things may not show up on the menu at the restaurant you are eating at, but knowing makes the food taste just a little bit better.

So if you are a restaurant and have yet to join the Omaha Restaurant Association, what are you waiting for? With the support they give, you'll be glad you did. And when you or your family dine at an ORA member restaurant, remember, you aren't eating for just one... you are eating for many. Go ahead and give grandma the night off from cooking too. She deserves it. Oh, and don't forget to order dessert. It's homemade.



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Omaha Standard: Orsi's Breadcrumbs

Orsi's Italian Bakery on 6th and Pacific is a cult icon—slightly unknown and perhaps a bit over-appreciated by its true believers. Nonetheless, Orsi's is an institution. It is a rustic bakery on the rumbly side of Omaha's just-now-being defined-as-classic Little Italy district. I spent many (really more like several) childhood days in the shadow of the Orsi Bakery. Not one of those childhood days was spent walking into the bakery. They were spent looking for parking in the family's Chevy Caprice Station Wagon under what I remember as a swinging street lamp so that we could tumble into the old, "Canig's on 6th...no 7th...whatever it's on Pacific...no it's on Pierce, dad's drugstore was on Pacific." Wherever we were actually going, the smell of fresh baked bread was marvelous when we got there. It made me hungry.

I remember the bread being served on the tables at Gorat's. I remember my Grandma and my dad in little debates/squabbles over whether they liked Orsi's or Rotella's better. I remember seeing the delivery driver for Orsi's trying to stock the shelf at my neighborhood Hy-Vee store and getting molested by the otherwise friendly shoppers as they clambered for his wares. Finally, I remember wandering over to the shelf after this frenzy and noticing just one lonely bag remaining. It was a bag of breadcrumbs. I had never seen such a thing. I was probably 11 or 12 years old, and I had yet to develop any sense of the economy of food. I thought only

that crumbs were things that wound up in the bottom of the toaster after making lots of toast for BLT's and were to be discarded. Gee willikers was I mistaken.

Breadcrumbs are an essential component of an effective and economical kitchen. They are made from staled bread, so at their core they are a recycled product. The real joy however comes from their use as a meatloaf stretcher, fried chicken coater, casserole topper, and trail marker. The use for breadcrumbs is boundless. And Orsi's are a special bread. They are made from their dense Italian loaves that begin to stale. [Note: stale≠moldy or bad. Stale=losing moisture and therefore icky to make sandwiches with.] This use of high quality bread is an affirmation of rule #7 which states "use only great ingredients". If the product you are trying to make is a great hamburger, that should start with great ground beef which comes from a well raised and well handled animal right? So if you are trying to make great meatloaf the same argument for beef applies, but then so does the argument for the binding and filling agents. Great breadcrumbs come from great bread which comes from a great bakery which uses great ingredients. If all bakeries, pizza shops, and food purveyors hummed this mantra as consistently and effectively as Orsi's, if that was Omaha's Standard for food, we would live in an entirely different world. It would be marvelous. It would be called Italy.

ACF Awards & Recognition

Nebraska State Fair

Sawyer Davis

Purple Ribbon – Heirloom Tomatoes

Sawyer is the daughter of heirloom vegetable master Beth Davis from Fertile Ground Family Farm Cooperative in Blair.

Des Moines Area Community College ACF Practical Testing

David Updike

Practical Exam – Certified Executive Pastry Chef

Please congratulate Chef Updike on his successful completion of the practical testing portion of the Certified Executive Pastry Chef Exam. Chef Updike is the pastry chef at Happy Hollow Country Club in Omaha.

2008 Comfort Food Classic

Patrick Gaughan

Champion – build the best burger competition. Chef Gaughan is the banquet chef at Happy Hollow Country Club in Omaha. The Comfort Food Classic is a benefit dinner for Ted E. Bear Hollow.

An Interview With Steve Villamonte; CEC, Executive Chef & Owner of Villamonte's Cuisine

MR: Chef, tell us about your family history in culinary arts and how it has influenced your career choices.

SV: My father Luis Villamonte was Peruvian born and came to the US to go to med school. He never showed up for classes and was subsequently cut off from the family support. His elder sister came from Peru to bring him home, but she refused and our government then gave him an ultimatum: serve in the US military or be deported. He joined the navy he served as a cook during his entire term. He became the executive chef at Happy Hollow in the sixties and worked several country clubs around the Midwest.

MR: What has been the most influential experience that has had the greatest impact on your career?

SV: When I was young and growing up so close to the business, I remember the position of a chef not having the respect that it does today. Back then looking for a living was considered second class work. I found that because of my experience growing up in the kitchen, I was way ahead of everyone else and could jump right into the tenured positions.

MR: What keeps you tied to and living in Omaha?

SV: Omaha is home and always will be. I probably will become a snowbird some day but that does not diminish my love for this city.

MR: In your opinion, what are some of the strong points or negative points in relative to the food scene within the Heartland?

SV: We have too many young people and students wanting immediate gratification. Gold medal plate presentations are great but they do not teach you practical survival, how to manage people, food and labor cost controls or expeditious line skills. A strong point would be the amount of skilled chefs we do have in Omaha that are ready to mentor the young chefs when they are ready for mentoring.

MR: What do you see happen-

ing in the food industry in the next 10 years?

SV: I remember when country club food was the best and you could not get the same quality anywhere else. Today you can get country club quality in many public restaurants but for a price. This same upscale quality will continue to seep into the mainstream restaurant, the price will drop, it will be served faster, and continue to become more casual.

MR: What would you like to say to those aspiring culinary professionals reading out interview?

SV: Make mentoring with a reputable chef an important part of your training, get all the education you can.

MR: Within the restaurant industry who do you feel will survive the slow economy and family spending cutbacks?

SV: The most skilled restaurateurs are the ones that can adapt to the changes of the economy.

MR: What is the most innovative thing within our industry that you have seen this past year?

SV: Manufacturing and processing technologies. I see foods today that I know are prefabricated, but have all the qualities of scratch preparation.

MR: How does Villamonte's Cuisine work to stay on top of trends and desires of the ever evolving customer?

SV: I give the customer what they want, no matter what that is. I custom menu's, make the price right, I do almost everything from scratch. Even simple menus are done with care.

MR: What can the membership do to assist in the continued growth and activity of the chapter?

SV: Lay down the egos, reach out to the tenured chefs, create smaller roles, and spread the responsibilities around. This will get the culinary community more involved.

MR: Chef, please tell our readers about the Annual Ron Sailor fund raising dinner?

SV: Ron was a rare chef that got along with everybody. He was a gentlemen and comedian with a lot of respect for his mentors. He progressed faster than anyone I have seen in this business. He did it the right way and it paid off. He developed friendships that to this day donate their time and talents for this annual event. I personally think it is one of Omaha's finest food events and the best part is almost all the proceeds go to culinary student scholarships.

MR: What would you like to share with our readers about how they can be involved in the most enjoyable event?

SV: If we get more chefs involved we would have to move the event because we are maxing out the Press Club. I think this would be the perfect chapter hosted event to get all the old school chefs to host a station. The guest could vote on their favorites. All for a good cause!

MR: Please share with us a personal goal to accomplish in the next 5-10 years?

SV: I have always dreamed of getting my Jurist Doctorate. Time seems to always be the issue. I will continue my education regardless. I would like my trademarked Thunderbird Salad to become a household staple and to continue growing beyond our local borders.

MR: Who do you look-up to or admire?

SV: Any chef who continues to grow and learn no matter what age. Lionel Have', Tom Shaw, Mike Flannigan. Anyone who gives to our profession because of passion for what they do. Someone who demonstrates integrity no matter what position they hold. This person will never have to look back with regret!

MR: What is your favorite place to dine in the Heartland area?

SV: Home!

On the Menu: – Pickles

Homemade condiments give food at several restaurants an extra kick. Here are some restaurants that offer homemade pickles on their menus:

Dundee Dell

Omaha, Nebraska

Item: Fried Pickles

While the pickles themselves are not made in house, the batter is. These delicious little fellas are worth the calories, the parking hassle, and burning the patootie out of your mouth on the first bite.

Holeman & Finch Public House

Atlanta, Georgia

Item: Assorted Homemade Pickles

One of the restaurants greatest contributions to the Atlanta dining scene. They are complementary and come in a ramekin filled with slices of semi-sweet and spicy pickles, coating in delicious brine.

Lulu Wilson

Aspen, Colorado

Chef: Shane Coffey

Item(s): Deep Fried Pickles and Kick Ass Pickles

(really, check out their menu at www.luluwilsonaspen.com)

A closely held family recipe keeps Chef Coffey's pickles from spreading like a brush fire across Colorado. Rumor has it that Classen has planted spies in the pantry of this up and coming Aspen eatery to try and decipher the magic.

Bouchon

Yountville, California

Chef: Thomas Keller

Item: Pickled Vegetables (on the charcuterie cart)

Our own operatives tell us that hot pickling liquid over the cool vegetables already in the crock is the key to success for these crowd favorites.

Augusta Restaurant

Oxford, Iowa

(about 40 minutes southwest of Mount Vernon)

Chef: Ben Halperin

Item: "Housemade Pickles"

They're incredibly fresh and crunchy, with just the right amount of sweet and spice and a nice onion undertone.



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FOOD & Spirits
MAGAZINE | OMAHA EDITION

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2008–2009 CULINARY TEAM NEBRASKA

Margaret Mary Boever
Craig Hoffman
Andy Rager
Mario Ochoa
Lauren Melhus
Jonathon Ahrens
Jen Valandra
Dina Miller
Jeremiah Omoto
Jenn Bergman
Jackson Wendell
Brian Sullivan
Stephanie Bloom
Jon Seymour

Coaches
Brian O'Malley
Kevin Newlin

Team Manager
Vieva McClure

Mentor
AJ Swanda

"I love this team." These four simple words are those that depict the honest devotion seen in the members of the Heartland Chapter's Junior ACF Culinary Competition Team from the Institute for the Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College.

As Team Nebraska prepares for the regional competition in Elgin, IL in February many of us will look back on the months leading up to that glory-filled time with great excitement and the awareness of conquering something great. Self discipline and refinement in skills and cookery are both great aspects to being a chef and two things that I know will personally be of great achievement when looking back on my time working long hours to accomplishing perfection in food.

Being a part of Team Nebraska has been a huge blessing in my culinary endeavors as I learn how to be committed to getting something done right and knowing the only way I'm going to reach a level far beyond my comprehension is by hours of rigorous, and yet rewarding, practice and diligence to succeed. No other opportunity has given me this kind of a vast outlook on what it means to be a true, devoted chef, wanting a career always reaching for something greater... something inconceivable.

With that being said, it would be appropriate to close with the truest statement uttered by all members ever to have been apart of Culinary Team Nebraska: "I love this team."

*Dina Miller, commis
2008-2009 Culinary Team Nebraska*



What makes a great salad

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More **BANG** for your **BUCK!**

by John Larkin

Lots of cigarettes at Jake
Cigars

With people these days moving away from the generic and cozying up to the boutique with just about all consumer products, I thought that I'd deviate from my normal topic of cigars and try to educate the public on another major smoke shop product: luxury cigarettes. I realize that most of the readers of this publication probably aren't smokers, and I am by no means suggesting you start, (that shit can kill you for hell's sake) but I think that both smokers and non-smokers might find this article interesting.

You've probably bought some craft beer recently. You might have tried a new wine variety that you've never heard of. If you're reading this magazine, you most likely have quite a few different styles of cuisine that you enjoy. So why, if you're a smoker, would you continue to just burn down the same old heaters every day? There's quite a variety of great options in the premium/import cigarette category, and by variety I don't mean Wild Horse and USA Golds.

Now I have to tell you that we smokers here in America used to have it much better. When I started my career as a death merchant at the tender age of 18 you had approximately 100-150 brands and 350-400 different packs of premium/import smokes available to the retailer. 10 years

"While you might pay a little more for your pleasure, remember, life's too short to smoke bad cigarettes.."

later there are around 25-35 brands and 100-150 packs to choose from. This is the evil by product of the Master Settlement Agreement. You might remember that this bill passed in 1998 and the "Big tobacco Companies" had to pay billions of dollars to the states, ostensibly to pay for healthcare tied to smoking related diseases. The law made all cigarettes from tobacco companies that don't pay large sums of money into the MSA illegal to sell, essentially forming a monopoly for Phillip Morris, R.J. Reynolds, and a few other big players. For most foreign tobacco companies this new law made it unprofitable to sell their cigarettes in the U.S. So over the last 10 years some of the best and most desirable import smokes have become no longer available including: Gauloise (France), George Karelias (Greece), Majors (Ireland), Turkish Specials (Netherlands, go figure), and John Player

Specials (England). Next time you're at a duty free shop in the airport, pick up one of these brands and thumb your nose at the tax man because I doubt they're coming back any time soon.

Now that I've mentioned some of what we've lost I can tell you about all that we still have. Dunhills, Nat Sherman's, Djarum, Botschafter, and Springwater among others. Dunhills have been a staple for quite a long time with their classic packaging and smooth taste. Originally manufactured in Great Britain, Dunhills are made with all Virginia tobacco and less additives than most grits. Dunhills continue to be seen as the flag bearer for luxury cigarettes throughout the world. When I was driving fuel trucks into Iraq in 2004 we used to stop at a Kuwaiti truck stop near the border. I could buy Cartons of Dunhill Lights for \$15. Not bad when the army was charging us \$30 for Marlboros.

Von Eicken is a lesser known manufacturer from Germany that makes the excellent aromatic cigarette brands Springwater, Shepheard's Hotel, and Botschafter. The original Springwater cigarettes have a wonderful vanilla pipe tobacco aroma while being exceptionally smooth. They also make a fine cherry version of the Springwaters. Shepheard's

Hotels are named after a historic hotel in Cairo, Egypt. They have a fragrant taste and smell that's hard to put your finger on and are great for occasional smoking. Cigars come in original and a vanilla flavor. The originals are a favorite of mine. While I'm not positive, I would assume that these cigarettes are made predominately with Turkish blend of tobacco. This imparts an earthy smoothness that Turkish tobacco is known for.

For those of you who've ever smoked or heard of American Spirits, Nat Sherman is their higher quality predecessor. Nat Sherman began as a cigar manufacturer based out of New York City in 1930 and broke into the cigarette business after a loyal customer complained that they would not allow cigar smoking on commercial airlines in 19???. Since then they have made the cream of the crop in 100% additive-free natural tobacco cigarettes. Here at Jake's Cigars we carry 18 different types of Nat Shermans. Most come in a queen size which is slightly thinner and longer

than the traditional cigarette. That's not to say these are just for the gals. As it clearly used to state on the box of a type called Cigarettellos, "FOR MEN AND WOMEN". With other tag lines such as "The World's Most Elegant Cigarette" you can't go wrong with a pack of "Natty's." My favorite of the bunch would be their Hint of Mints. They are a brown papered cigarette that has mint crystals in the filter that give it a nice after dinner chocolate mint sort of flavor. Remember that Shermans are 100% additive free meaning that nothing, including flavorings is bastardizing your tobacco. The other bonus of smoking Nat's? They last a lot longer than commercial cigs. Because they don't treat their tobacco they have to put more into each cigarette to fill it up. Meaning you're getting more smoke for your buck and you can prolong heading back to your cubicle for at least 15-20 minutes.

So what I'm really trying to say is that if you've ever ordered a Sierra Nevada, a Fat Tire, or a Chilean Carmenere instead of a

Bud Light or California Cab, then next time you're out of heaters, stop by a good smoke shop and treat yourself to something tastier. While you might pay a little more for your pleasure, remember, life's too short to smoke bad cigarettes.



John Larkin is co-owner of Jake's Cigars & Spirits in both Omaha and Lincoln. He's been smoking and selling cigars for close to 10 years having begun his career as a tobacco merchant right out of high school in

Salt Lake City. John moved to Lincoln in 2002 to run Jake's for longtime friend Alex Roskelley. After serving a tour in Iraq with the Army Reserve he came home and bought into the original Jake's in downtown Lincoln. In August 2006 John and Alex opened a new shop in downtown Benson where he now resides with his wife. John spends much of his time in business meetings (golfing), smoking cigars, & questing after the best beers, bourbons, and wines he can get his hands on.

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JAKE'S

Cigars & Spirits



BEER Review

by Marq Manner



St. Peters India Pale Ale-United Kingdom

ABV 5.5%: Rating C

This was served from the standard St. Peters flask/medicine bottle. St. Peters is well known for it's Cream Stout and English and Golden Ales. All are excellent beers so I figured that they had a good shot at making a decent IPA.

Appearance: Light orange hazy straw color with some lacing and a quickly disappearing head. **B**

Smell: Kind of funky, defiantly not the typical desired odor of a well crafted IPA. **C**

Taste: There is a subtle signature flavor that lets you know that it is a St. Peters beer, but it doesn't work too well with the IPA. Kind of dull and bland for an IPA. Some citrus and a bit of bitter hops, but not all that well balanced. Lacks the zing of a good lively IPA. **C**

Drinkability: It's not horrible, but in a time when there are some fantastic IPA's on the market, even by local brewers, this would sit at the back of the fridge waiting for a night where I forgot to stop by the liquor store. **C**



Boulder Beer Co.-Obovoid-Emperial Russian Stout

ABV 8%: Rating B

This was served from a bomber into a typical pint glass. This is the 8th release in Boulder Beer Companies "Looking Glass" series of craft beers.

Appearance: Dark brown with a nice thick head. Two fingers for me. Excellent lacing on this stout that lasts for the majority of ones experience with this beer. **B+**

Smell: Coffee and chocolate with very little oak smell considering that it is hyped as being aged in oak. **B-**

Taste: Again coffee and chocolate (dark?). Again not much oak. Some bitterness which seems typical of Boulder Brewing Company Beers. **B**

Mouthfeel: Light for a stout. This beer is not as thick as your typical imperial stout. **B-**

Drinkability: The Obovoid is a drinkable beer and one that might catch up to you quicker than one would expect. Decent effort from a company that consistently makes slightly above average craft beers. **B**



Ommegang Hennepin Farmhouse Saison Ale-United States

ABV 7.7%: Rating A

An offering from the Ommegang family known for their Beir De Mars and Three Philosopher beers. This was served from a bomber into a goblet.

Appearance-Yellowish straw color with white fluffy head. Two more fingers. A steady lasting lacing for most of the trip with this beer. **A**

Smell-Smokey citrus with a some spice to it. **A**

Taste-Citrus with a spicy finish. Apricots and oranges. **A+**

Mouthfeel-high carbonation, with some layers to it. Medium body and very smooth. **A**

Drinkability-very drinkable. Probably too much so, as two bombers would be easy to put down and would put all but the hardcore drinkers down as well. **A+**





BARREL AGED BEER

Back to the Way it Was

by Paul Kavulak

It's an unfortunate circumstance, but when forced to think of an image related to beer, I'm betting the images that most often come to mind are those from the countless hours of televised media depicting beer in the most basic of social settings. Sure, beer at a basic level is a great social lubricant – enjoyed at tailgate parties, picnics, outdoor events, and used to simply catch up at the corner bar. Portrayed as a common beverage due in some part to its inexpensive and ubiquitous nature. But these are the scenes devoted largely to the beaten path – and if you've been paying attention to these articles, this is nothing about the road most taken.

Beer – and we'll draw a distinction between the mass produced products and Craft Beer – has found an incredibly interesting relationship with wood. Not our everyday beer factory dosing of peachwood, but one borne of a desire to give character, to impart complexities in flavor, and to intertwine spirits with suds, and hops with oak. Barrel aging. A practice once common to both wine and beer and now more commonly associated with the former. But there is a difference in today's experimentation with the barrel when it comes to Craft Beer.

In today's Craft Beer movement, it isn't enough to stop with a product of depth and character created through simple fermentation alone. Consider the complexities created through a union of beer with Bourbon, Whisky, or wine. Aged oak and the dryness of tannins – and God forbid, the introduction of microorganisms whose prime function is to create sourness – almost bordering on the edge of ruin. Some of

“Sure, beer at a basic level is a great social lubricant – enjoyed at tailgate parties, picnics, outdoor events, and used to simply catch up at the corner bar.”

today's most exemplary beers, and those not found in 24 packs, are the result of cellar aging – in nearly the same fashion as wine. Oak casks used to previously age wine or spirits can still contain a tremendous amount of “formerly-housed” product due to the

permeability of the oak itself. In addition to the obvious character within a previously used Chardonnay cask for example, the simple fact that these barrels aren't exactly airtight opens the door (quite literally) for microbial exposure – and in some cases, that's exactly what the brewdoctor ordered.

Without delving too deeply into the exact microbes and what they do specifically, suffice it to say that they are more commonly controlled and eliminated rather than embraced. Sour, tart, astringent, or puckering are more mainstream flavor descriptors when encountering these “bugs”

So why do it? Let's take a look at the barrel itself for a moment. There is an interesting lineage – and actual law when it comes to the production of Bourbon for example. New American White Oak must be used which, when emptied of Bourbon, can then be reused to age rum, other spirits, and in our case beer. While this first-use or maturation of the Bourbon actually remove some of the charred oak character, it also imparts bourbon essences into the oak which a subsequent maturation of beer will absorb. The same is in large part true for casks that have previously aged wine or other spirits. So, at a basic level, a beer that matures in

Previously used oak casks will take on a character, in measure, of the product once housed within the barrel. Fairly basic.

But what's not so basic is the effect of evaporation, pure age, oak tannins, the degree of charring upon the oak – or lack thereof, continued fermentation by those “bugs” other than yeast, and ambient temperature. There are other more scientific variables but I think you get the picture there's a lot going on here!

Barrel aged beers may lie in state for short periods but in many cases, higher alcohol beers can withstand the aging process and press on for years where the transfer of character, and effects of aging, compound themselves. It isn't much of a stretch to envision the evaporation (commonly referred to as the Angel's Share) and the subsequent concentration of product left behind.

And this is where the most difficult aspect of an article such as this develops – finding commercial examples where one can explore the fruits of labor in an industry that most often measures the lifespan of a product in months.

Are they worth the effort – to both create and to seek one out? Most definitely. A beer that has been barrel aged in Chardonnay for example finds fruit aromatics and exotic flavors in a beverage that would normally be more tightly confined to descriptors commonly associated with beer alone.

Bourbon barrel aging of a darker ale finds a rich complexity that makes one savor the plum, the pear, and the warming effects of a rich, deeply intense experience. We don't find those terms too often when confined to beer alone.

To find one – one needn't go too far but one must know where to look, and Omaha and the surrounding areas just happen to have some havens within which to score one of these experiences. But once you arrive at one of these destinations – you need to know what you are looking for. It's always best to ask a knowledgeable wait person but when on your own, look for phrases such as Oak Aged, Cask Conditioned, Barrel Aged etc. Breweries that have taken the time to develop these time consuming and expensive beers will take the time to communicate the

added value within the bottle.

So get out to your local brewery or beer emporium. Ask and you shall be rewarded. Believe me.

Beertopia, Nebraska Brewing Company, and Upstream Brewing Company all offer oak aged products – get out there and live beyond the basic!



Paul's first professional life was spent working in IT. Most recently as the SVP of Enterprise Technology Integration for West Corporation and while this occupied his daylight hours, most of the others were consumed by an immersion in beer. Not physically – his passion exists in beer and brewing. Prior to starting up Nebraska Brewing Company with his wife, Kim – Paul has been homebrewing for roughly 17 years. This passion formed the basis for a dogged pursuit of perfection in numerous beer styles and beer history. Livin' the dream.



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Red Wine

and the Heal+hy Lifestyle

by John Fischer

The salutary benefits obtained by drinking red wine come from two different mechanisms. One is from alcohol; the other is from health-giving compounds, called polyphenols. Polyphenols are found in the pigments of fruits and vegetables and are found in concentrated amounts in red wine. One of the most convincing demonstrations relating to the health benefits of wine is the “French Paradox.”

Dr. Renaud and Dr. Ellison of Boston University noted that wine-drinking French smoked more, ate more saturated fats, and exercised less than people in the United States, yet have well over one-third fewer heart attacks. These men also had a diet that included olive oil, nuts, processed milk products (they drank little whole-milk), vegetables, and fruits. Was it the diet or the wine? Probably both.

“There is, without any doubt, a significant decrease in the incidence of heart attacks, congestive heart failure, strokes, and peripheral vascular disease in individuals who are moderate consumers of red wine.”

There are a large numbers of studies that have demonstrated the many health benefits associated with the moderate consumption of wine. Moderation is the key word, because over consumption is decidedly unhealthy: binge

drinking entails an even unhealthier statistic. Moderate consumption is up to two five ounce glasses/day of red wine for men, and one five ounce glass for women. Bigger men may be able to push this limit to up to ½ bottle, but no more. The difference in amounts between men and women has a physiologic bases that is beyond the scope of this article.

The health benefits from drinking wine as related to the heart and blood vessels are well recognized in medical literature. There is, without any doubt, a significant decrease in the incidence of heart attacks, congestive heart failure, strokes, and peripheral vascular disease in individuals who are moderate consumers of red wine. What’s more, even teetotalers or casual drinkers who have a history of heart or blood vessel disease will increase their longevity if they start drinking red wine in moderation.

Newer research has demonstrated many other less known salutary effects in many other organ systems of the body. Several studies indicate that the incidence of cancers of the lung, pancreas, stomach, kidney, prostate, ovary, and lymph nodes are decreased in moderate wine consumers. Degenerative neurological diseases such as Parkinson’s disease and Alzheimer’s disease have a substantially lower incidence associated with the consumption of as little as one glass (5 oz.) of red wine per day.

Wine is beneficial in decreasing the incidence of several other conditions such as gall stones, kidney stones, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, and arthritis. Recent studies also suggest that the incidence of diseases such as the common cold, periodontal disease, and age related deafness may be decreased by the moderate consumption of red wine. Drinking red wine in moderation may even be helpful in the struggle to lose or maintain weight.

“The health benefits from drinking red wine as related to the heart and blood vessels are well recognized in medical literature. ”

For women, there is a downside in regards to alcohol consumption. Recent studies have shown that alcohol, regardless of the type, is associated with an increase incidence of breast cancer. Previous studies had shown that wine, in contradistinction to other alcoholic beverages, had no carcinogenic effect. There is still a lingering question in the minds of researchers in regard to the carcinogenic effect of red wine on breast cancer and many feel that the final word is not in.



On the brighter side, studies that supplemental folate might provide some solace in regard to the association between alcohol intake and breast cancer risk. In one study, women who regularly consumed at least 15 grams/day of alcohol (a little over one drink) and also consumed at least 300 mcg of folate had a significantly lower risk of breast cancer than women who consumed the same amount of alcohol but consumed less than 300 mcg/day of folate. In spite of this evidence, the relationship between alcohol, red wine, folate, and breast cancer needs to be further clarified. To be on the safe side, women who drink alcohol should consider taking a 400 mcg folic acid supplement.

“There is a decrease in overall mortality rate and a concomitant increase in longevity by several years associated with the moderate consumption of red wine”

In any case, in both men and women, there is a decrease in overall mortality rate and a concomitant increase in longevity by several years associated with the moderate consumption of red wine. Another interesting fact is that the incidence of DWI's in wine drinkers is much lower than in imbibers of beer or spirit. Beer is typically the beverage of the impaired driver. Drinking red wine not only fits in with but augments a healthy lifestyle. The findings cited above are for a large part statistical analyses that may be in a state of flux. Nevertheless, many studies such as the effects on the heart and blood vessels have stood the test of time, and their stated health-giving effects are well documented and very convincing.



Dr. John Fischer is a member and two-time president of the Omaha Branch of the International Wine & Food Society, past director of the Nebraska chapter of the LADV, and the founding member of the Council Bluffs Branch of the International Wine and Food Society. He teaches a course on matching wine with food at the Institute for the Culinary Arts in Omaha and is author of the books, “The Evaluation of Wine – A Comprehensive Guide to the Art of Wine Tasting” and “Wine and Food – 101.”

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Wine Your Friends and Influence People

by John Finocchiaro



You are an avid wine drinker. You have been imbibing for years and have amassed a small arsenal of memorable wines. You have visited winery or two, done a bit of reading on the subject, and are comfortable discussing wines with anyone who will listen. Friends and family ask your opinion as to which selections you recommend for their dinner party or holiday gathering. Congratulations, you are now a “wine geek”, and proud of it. So now what?

envisioned, what will?

Most well-to-do wine lovers drink plenty of great wines. However, they are not popping \$50 corks every night unless they bought in on the initial stock offering of Berkshire-Hathaway. Let's face it, these people didn't get where they are today by squandering their cash. For everyday consumption they are looking for wine values. And the greatest sources of excellent wine values today are the new discoveries, the up-and-comers, the previously unknown varieties. What is ironic is that these wines have been around for decades and are only now being brought to our attention. Here's a list of a few of these hidden jewels.

New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc with its distinctive citrus, lime, and grapefruit flavors has been a big success in recent years. But the real jewel of the islands is Pinot Noir. It is the fastest growing red wine in the U.S., and for good reason. Good Pinot is to die for. Whether it be from Burgundy, Oregon, Sonoma's Russian River Valley, or California's Central Coast, its silky, seductive, velvety flavors are like no other. But Pinot Noir is a fussy grape and difficult to grow. In other words, the good stuff is expensive. For great value check New Zealand. Pinot Noir is New Zealand's most widely planted red grape, and the juice from the Martinborough, Marlborough, and Central Otago regions is excellent.

Another steal in the world of red wines is Malbec from Argentina. Malbec came to Argentina in the 1800's by way of France, where other Bordeaux varieties have all but extinguished its presence there. The appeal of Malbec may best be defined by what it is not. Malbec typically does not possess the harsh tannins that may be found in many Cabernets. Most are not over-extracted, high-alcohol fruit bombs as may be the case in many Zinfandels. And they are not wimpy, like many Merlots. What these medium-bodied wines do possess are soft tannins, flavors of rich dark fruit with some spiciness and a certain earthy, old-world character. Argentina is the fifth

“Friends and family ask your opinion as to which selections you recommend for their dinner party or holiday gathering. Congratulations, you are now a ‘wine geek’, and proud of it. So now what?”

Our passion leads us to continually one-up ourselves. We may hunt down that limited-production cabernet or spring for that overpriced-but magnificent trophy wine to add to our collection. And now we can recount the entire experience of chasing down the magic elixir as if we had been on safari, bravely tracking down the wild, rare animal in the uttermost caverns of the valley, until we finally captured the beast that has eluded bounty hunters for all these years. We even had the privilege of shaking the winemaker's hand! Yes, we now have years of cocktail party wine-ammo with which to bore our friends and alienate people. Boastful and dramatic wine tales tend to have the same effect on the public as does the recounting of one's last round of golf. We love our wine tales, but that doesn't mean our friends will. So, if wine is our passion and one-upsmanship doesn't draw the throngs of admirers we had

“Spain is a hotbed of great wines, particularly from the regions of Rioja, and Priorat. Spanish wine regulations and aging requirements have always been among the most stringent in the world, and the resulting quality shows in the wines.”

ggest wine producing country in the world, ahead of Germany, Australia, and Chile; and Malbec is their pride and joy.

Speaking of Chile, have you heard of Carmenere? Like Malbec, Carmenere also originated from France where it is now far less popular. Carmenere is softer and lighter than Malbec, without the bite. If you are looking for something similar to Merlot, check out Chilean Carmenere. However, you do need to be selective, as many are forgettable.

Spain is a hotbed of great wines, particularly from the regions of Rioja, and Priorat. Spanish wine regulations and aging requirements have always been among the most stringent in the world, and the resulting quality shows in the wines. Tempranillo is Spain's claim to fame, producing serious, age-worthy wines that can still be consumed young. At its best, Tempranillo can be big and graceful, with earthy flavors and good complexity. These are old-world, serious wines. If you're looking for an alternative to Cabernet this may be your ticket.

"Italy is loaded with terrific wines, with thousands of different wine grapes from which to choose. Quickly growing in popularity among these is Sicily's most popular red grape, Nero d'Avola: 'The black grape of Avola'."

Spain's most popular white wine is Albarino, from the northwest region of Rias Baixas in Galicia. Simply put, this is great stuff. Fresh, lively, clean, and crisp with melon, peach, and pear flavors and good acidity. A very versatile wine, Albarino pairs well with chicken, fish, or spicy Asian dishes, or on its own as an excellent refreshing aperitif.

Italy is loaded with terrific wines, with thousands of different wine grapes from which to choose. Quickly growing in popularity among these is Sicily's most popular red grape, Nero d'Avola. "The black grape of Avola" is grown in abundance, and its strong, intensely flavored, high-alcohol wines were previously dedicated almost exclusively to fortifying the wines of France and northern Italy. Advancements in viticulture have enabled growers to retain the ripe, black-fruit flavors and soft tannins without overpowering the wine. Somewhat comparable to Syrah, Nero d'Avola is capable of producing big, hearty, beefy wine. Think Rambo. Not Dr. Phil.

Good values for all of these wines can be found between \$8 and \$15 per bottle. Unfortunately, as time goes on and these wines gain in popularity prices will increase accordingly. But for now exciting new wines are in abundance, fueling our continuing desire to discover the undiscovered. Check 'em out. Then tell a friend. And don't be surprised if you find a few bottles of your recommendations being served at their next party.



John Finocchiaro is co-owner of Johnson Brothers Finnocchiaro, LLC, a Nebraska wholesale wine, spirits, and beer distributor. Formerly the owner of Finocchiaro Wine Co., Inc., John has been in the wine distribution business for the past 25 years and the Finocchiaro family's association with the Nebraska wine industry has been continuous for the past 73 years, since 1935. John was a Certified Public Accountant before entering the family business and is a Certified Specialist of Wine.

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Cuthills Vineyards — Uniqueness

While all of Nebraska's Vineyards and Wineries give us something different on the wine shelf than the norm, Cuthills has given the wine world wines that can found nowhere else. This all started as a dream of Ed Swanson's over thirty years ago, and

created (for the most part) by selecting a male partner and a female and getting them together. With grapes there isn't much romance involved but a lot of painstaking work with very small parts on the grape flower. Ed started breeding new grapes in 1996 and began the process with Nebraska's

"What we are doing at Cuthills takes things a step further by creating new grapes with new flavors that no one else has." ~ Ed Swanson.

as culminated two years ago in the release of a new grape variety called Temparia. To make a long story short, new grape varieties are created the same way new people are

native grape vitis Riparia (the cold hardy disease resistant female parent), and Cabernet Franc, Sangiovese, and Tempranillo as the male parent. Swanson said "We want to





combine all of the good aspects of a grape that has evolved here over the centuries with the classic European flavors we have come to know and love". Ed's current progress has been to incorporate Zinfandel, Refosco, Syrah-Shiraz, and Cabernet Sauvignon into his grape breeding.

The remodeled 1920's barn can seat up to 80 for parties meeting, receptions, etc.

Ok, so what does that mean for the consumer? Just like every other winery in the great plains, Cuthills strives to give the wine consumer what they're used to, and that is the same styles we have always had, wines to fit every occasion. "What we are doing at Cuthills takes things a step further by creating new grapes with new flavors that no one else has." Swanson said. To differentiate these new wines from Cuthills regular one they have created a new brand called "Primordium Cellars". Primordium Cellars wines will be 100% from these grapes, 100% unique to the new brand.

Swanson was asked if he was going to be stingy and keep all of these grapes to himself and the answer was luckily a "no". "As a matter of fact I will be releasing a new grape to the industry this spring". This new variety is a Red Muscat which Swanson claims is somewhat a rarity in the wine world. Some of Cuthills new varieties are also being tested by the University of Nebraska under the direction of Dr. Paul Read the head of the Viticulture program. Does Swanson see these new varieties shaking up the wine world?

"Wine world is just what it is, we are in a global wine market that is very competitive and these unique wines certainly help, but we can't forget the marketing aspect of our business, they won't sell themselves!" said Swanson.

Ed's new varieties are not the only unique thing about Cuthills. Holly Swanson, Ed's partner in life and business has her own passion, designing and making jewelry. After attending the Academy of Silversmithing and Art Metal in Boulder, CO and the Taos School of Metalsmithing and Lapidary Design in Taos, NM, Holly Swanson founded Holly Eve Designs. With a history of talent and dedicated to her passion, Holly now fabricates each piece of jewelry from sterling silver, gold, copper and gemstones to create one of a kind and limited works of wearable art. "Even though my work at the winery comes first, I have a studio in the back of the winery and work on my jewelry during slow times. I sell my jewelry at the winery, online and in several galleries in the US." says Swanson.

Although Cuthills might seem a little more than a jaunt away from the metro area (2.5 hrs. one way) it's easy to make the round trip in a day or spend the night at the "Tuscan Villa B&B" literally a stones throw away from the winery. The winery also has a loft in the remodeled 1920's barn that can seat up to 80 for parties, meetings, receptions etc. Around the holidays Holly is always busy making up private wine labels for families and businesses and reminds people that Cuthills can ship the wine to many locations. Ed says not too forget "the Uptown" restaurant in Stanton on your way to Pierce, the menu is unparalleled in the area and by far the best wine list around.

Swanson said "Nebraska's wineries already have a reputation with consumers and in the industry of unique and tasty whites, these new reds could be our answer to both worlds. With all of the new things showing up on the shelf from all over the globe, today's consumers are more adventurous and this opens the doors wide for us, we just have to step through."



Popping Your Cork:

– Options Abound Across Omaha

by Bill MacKenzie



“Wine is sunlight, held together by water.”
– Galileo Galilei

“Wine is bottled poetry.”
– Robert Louis Stevenson

Up to the age of forty eating is beneficial. After forty, drinking.
– The Talmud,

Winter winds can be most annoying to warm blooded mammals. Add in a serious dearth of degrees (as in Fahrenheit or Celsius) and the temptation is to crawl into our residential cocoons in late November, and stay there until March, save for the unavoidable trips to work, school and the grocery. Heck, with telecommuting, classes over the internet and online shopping, some of you may have no reason at all to venture out of doors in this season of darkness. Most of us are amply stocked with enough food and alcohol to survive a 30-day hibernation with no ill effect. Except for that cabin fever thing, that is.

When it comes to enjoying a favorite bottle of wine, sipping your cabernet or chardonnay while ensconced in front of a crackling fire in your family room has its undeniable pleasures. Yet, man is a social being, meant to shop, dine out, and socialize. Wine is a part of socializing. Heck, it's practically synonymous with socializing.

“What are the options for frugal Omaha oenophiles who love nothing more than enjoying a good bottle of wine out with friends?”

In this winter of our economic discontent, however, what are the options for frugal Omaha oenophiles who love nothing more than enjoying a good bottle of wine out with friends, but who balk at paying high restaurant markup prices for less than high end wine?

Enter the wine bar. Omaha has a number of attractive, friendly venues where anyone of age may not only purchase a bottle of wine at standard retail prices, but may enjoy their purchase on site. What follows is a look at a handful of Omaha's most popular wine bars, including a couple who have stood the test of time and some relative upstarts. Each offers its own unique spin on the concept of retail wine store/wine bar. You are sure to find one (or more) that will appeal to you.

Corkscrew Wine & Cheese
Rockbrook Village, 108th & W. Center Rd.
991-2927 www.corkscrewwineandcheese.com

Corkscrew Wine & Cheese, nestled comfortably in Rockbrook Center since April 2006, is a handsome addition to the wine store/wine bar scene in Omaha. Owner Corey Keith transitioned happily from an economics and computer background to owner of this spacious indoor/outdoor celebration of the good life. The store has an extended wall of wine and spirits, with bottle prices starting at about \$8 and averaging \$12-\$22. The crowd tends toward the 'baby boomer' demographic befitting of the surrounding established neighborhood, but anyone over 21 is welcome to imbibe. There is ample seating for 30 or so indoors on sofas and comfy chairs, plus a large outdoor patio seating a similar number. The patio is complete with a gorgeous outdoor fireplace.

While outdoor seating is seasonal, the indoors is reason enough to visit. The \$5 per bottle corkage charge is waived for wine purchases of \$25 or more, and if a full bottle is not on your menu, there is also an ever-changing list of up to 20 bottles served by the glass, for anywhere from \$5-10 for a 5 ounce pour. Cheese and meat plates are sold, as well as desserts. A small selection of wine related merchandise is also offered for sale. Corkscrew is open seven days a week, including extended hours until Midnight on Fridays and Saturdays.

Spirit World
7517 Pacific St.
391-8680 www.spiritworldwine.com

Longtime Omaha wine marketer Spirit World has been selling fine wines from across the globe in midtown for three decades. Located at 75th and Pacific, the store is perhaps the state's largest wine store, and offers an enticing deli and bakery on premises, which is a popular mid-day lunch spot for area workers. Founded in the 1970s by Denny Lewis, Spirit World changed ownership in January 2008. New owner Laurie Hellbusch Wolford, a lawyer by training and self-described lover of food and wine, has set about to place her own stamp on this popular gathering spot of the well-to-do, as well as those starting their climb up the social ladder. The store seems less cluttered than before, but has not forgotten its roots in offering a wide selection of popularly priced wines from throughout Europe, Latin America and Australia, as well as our domestic wine producing states. Wines are clearly organized by both grape varietal as well as by geographic region. Bottle prices start at about \$10 and soar

del into the hundreds of dollars for twenty and thirty year old classics. Most bottles are in the \$15-25 range, which is the retail price point where affordability and quality most broadly intersect.

The Spirit World deli, run by new chef Laura Doocy, offers a nice selection of high end salads, as well as deli meats and cheeses, and baked on premises desserts. And what better to go with your salad or sandwich than a nice glass of wine? Ten seasonal selections are offered by the glass at the deli, or customers may purchase a bottle from the retail portion of the store and enjoy their selection with no corking fee in the store's informal 50 seat dining area. The deli runs daily (except on Sunday) happy hour from 5-7 pm, where wines are \$2.50 per glass! If that isn't a partial cure for your shrinking wallet I don't know what is.

Spirit World offers \$15 wine tastings the first Thursday of each

"Spirit World offers \$15 wine tastings each month, which includes tastings of five or more higher end wines, plus light appetizers."

month, which includes tastings of five or more higher end wines, plus light appetizers. The store additionally features informal free wine tastings each Saturday from Noon until 8 pm, which is an excellent way to discover new wines that appeal to your palate.

Besides the large wine and spirit selection, and the sit-down deli/bakery, Spirit World also offers a limited selection of packaged gourmet foods, gifts and other wine accessories. As a boost to local area wineries, a nice selection of Nebraska produced wines is also available.

The Winery
741 N. 98th St.
391-3535 1-800-884-WINE www.thewineryomaha.com

Are you by chance old enough to recall the wonderful Food City Wine & Spirits store that once graced 120th and W. Center Rd.? If so, you will be happy to know that when that legendary store closed several of their 'wine guys' opened The Winery, located just east of 120th & Penney Westroads. Open 22 years, this small but densely packed



Wine purveyor/deli has built a loyal following of thousands of customers. Owner David Deao and his seemingly ever present sidekick Joe Copenhagen have between them over 50 years of wine-cology, so you can believe them when they recommend a wine that it is a good one. The store features a small deli with seating, open from 7 am until 3 pm for breakfast and lunch during the week, 10 am until 3 pm on Saturdays. Wines by the glass are sold in the deli for a mere \$3, and if you come when the deli is open you can buy your own bottle from the retail side and enjoy it with no corkage charge.

The Winery specializes in wines for \$10-20 per bottle, although those with more cash to spend will not be disappointed in the selection of pricier offerings. California and Oregon wines are well represented, but lovers of European wines as well as wines from throughout the Southern Hemisphere will also find the selection to their liking. Sign up in the store for The Winery's free quarterly newsletter for discount offerings and news of upcoming events. I like to think of the staff at The Winery as being my personal spiritual advisors. You will, too.

WineStyles
72nd & Pacific/Village Point
884-6696/991-8919 www.winestyles.net

This Ft. Lauderdale chain opened in Omaha two years ago, and now has two stores, including the Shoppes of Aksarben and Village Pointe. The concept for each store is the same. Wines are grouped by flavor and color into eight categories, rather than by varietal type or countries of origin. You want a bold wine to go with your backyard BBQ? Head to the Bold section. Would you rather have an oaky white? They have a section for those as well. About 150 wines are offered for sale, and almost all range in price from \$10 - \$25. The store also offers two wine clubs, where members receive 2 or 3 selected wines each month, plus discounts on wines in store.

WineStyles offers customers the added option of on-site sipping; wines may be purchased by the glass, or you may purchase and consume a full bottle in the store for a \$5 corkage fee. There is seating for a dozen or so throughout the shop. Some chocolates, cheese and other lighter fare may be purchased, but there is no food service. The customer base seems to skew younger than at some of the other wine stores in town. As with the other wine stores, wine related gift items are offered for sale. Each Friday WineStyles offers wine tastings from 5-8 pm, where 6 wines may be sampled for \$5.

Other popular wine bars of note:

La Buvette Wine and Grocery
511 S 11th St. 344-8627

Cigarro's
13110 Birch Drive Suite 108
496-9595 www.cigarrosomaha.com

Dundee Cork & Bottle
614 N 50th St. 934-2118



Bill is better known to many in Omaha BBQ circles as "BBQ Bill." For the past 15 years he has been a member of the Greater Omaha Barbecue Society (GOBS), including serving a recent stint as president. BBQ has been one of Bill's food passions since his college days in the 1980s. As a certified BBQ Judge under rules of the Kansas City BBQ Society, Bill has judged sanctioned barbecue contests in 5 states.

Libation Conversation

The 'Old Fashioned'

by Dan Crowell

It seems in many cases that the simpler a drink appears to be at first glance, the more complicated it actually is when examined more fully. Consider the Old-Fashioned; bitters, cherry, orange slice, sugar cube, bourbon, ice. Seems simple enough, but there's significantly more to this grand potation than meets the eye.

To fully appreciate this drink, its construction, its cultural significance and the controversy it seems to generate, one must look first at its history. The history of the Old-Fashioned is connected to the origins of the cocktail itself. In fact, one of the earliest definitions of the word 'cocktail' committed to print appears to describe fairly closely the original Old-Fashioned. The May 13, 1806 edition of the Hudson County periodical, *The Balance and Columbian Repository*, in response to a reader's inquiry, defines the cocktail in this way:

"Cock tail, then, is a stimulating liquor, composed of spirits of any kind, sugar, water and bitters it is vulgarly called a bittered sling, and is supposed to be an excellent electioneering potion inasmuch as it renders the heart stout and bold, at the same time it fuddles the head."

Incidentally, the 'electioneering' reference in the above quote refers to the fairly common practice among politicians of the day of plying voters with alcohol throughout their campaigns, specifically on Election Day, which eventually led to widely administered restrictions regarding Election Day alcohol sales, still on the books today in some states and municipalities.

Having been somewhat of a known quantity since the early 1800s, it comes as little surprise that the blueprint for the Old-Fashioned was considered old-fashioned by the time it was first listed as the Old-Fashioned Whiskey Cocktail in George Kappeler's 1895 book, *Modern American Drinks*. An unnamed bartender at the Pendennis Club, a private club still in operation in Louisville, Kentucky, is widely credited with having created the drink in the first place.

This brings us to our first controversy-generating point – The Fruit. There is no orange or cherry (muddled or otherwise) mentioned in the recipe for the original Old-Fashioned.

Old-Fashioned Whiskey Cocktail

(circa 1895)

- 1) Dissolve a small lump of sugar with a little water in a whiskey glass.*
- 2) Add two dashes Angostura bitters, a small piece of ice, lemon peel, one jigger whiskey.
- 3) Mix with a small bar spoon and serve, leaving spoon in glass.

*the short, thick-bottomed glass traditionally used for this drink came to be known as an 'Old-Fashioned Glass', long before it was called a 'Rocks' glass.

Some slight recipe tweaks appeared in time, including the addition of Curacao (mercifully, not the blue stuff), orange bitters, maraschino liqueur, even Absinthe, but the orange slice didn't appear as an ingredient in an Old-Fashioned until the publication of Harry Craddock's *Savoy Cocktail Book* in 1930, and then only as a garnish (not muddled).

NOTE: Mixology guru Dale DeGroff points out in *The Craft of the Cocktail* that the Whiskey Cobbler (circa 1862), a precursor to the Old-Fashioned, was shaken with two pieces of orange in the mixing glass. The cherry didn't make an appearance until the publication of Julien Proskauer's *What'll You Have?* in 1933, where it was listed as an ingredient in the cocktail along with the orange slice (still



An Old Fashioned Cocktail at Jake's Cigars.
photo by Dave Ahlquist

(muddled). The use of a lemon twist as a garnish persists in this recipe.

Many (but not all) cocktail historians assert that the addition of fruits like orange and cherry into the Old-Fashioned were affectations of Prohibition. During Prohibition, the quantity of spirits available (albeit, by less-than-legal means) to the drinking public remained plentiful but the relative quality level suffered mightily, prompting the addition of a dizzying array of cocktail ingredients whose purpose was to mask the inferior quality of the spirits. Some Old-Fashioned purists view the addition of fruits beyond the lemon twist garnish as 'frivolous window-dressing', as Crosby Gaige, president of the New York Wine & Food Society, noted in 1945.

As to the fruit and muddling question in general, opinions and tastes vary. The Joy of Mixology author Gary Regan sums it up in his way: "The fruit question is a serious one, and although many people in the twenty-first century expect a small fruit salad to be muddled into their drink, a good bartender will always ask before proceeding." It should be noted that Regan himself prefers the 'fruit salad' treatment of an Old-Fashioned to the historically accurate one, as does the aforementioned DeGroff.

"Many (but not all) cocktail historians assert that the addition of fruits like orange and cherry into the Old-Fashioned were affectations of Prohibition...whose purpose was to mask the inferior quality of the spirits."

Controversy-generating point #2 – Soda, Water, or none of the above. In early Old-Fashioned recipes, a small amount of water was called for only as a means to dissolve the sugar, which dissolves much less readily in alcohol. NOTE: the substitution of simple syrup for the sugar and water in an Old-Fashioned is an effective way to achieve the desired cocktail flavor profile while eliminating the possibility of grittiness from un-dissolved sugar. Some later recipes called for an increased amount of water or the addition of soda water, but these additions are viewed by many Old-Fashioned aficionados as detrimental to the cocktail. As cocktail expert Robert Hess puts it, "Such a sin should be viewed in the same light as ordering a finely cooked steak in a classy restaurant, and then smothering it with ketchup."

As with all cocktails, there are no absolutes regarding the preparation of an Old-Fashioned. Research and experimentation will in

time lead you to the perfect recipe for your palate. In that light, I leave you with the following Old-Fashioned recipe bestowed generously upon me by a member of a prominent small-batch bourbon producing family:

Old-Fashioned (Family Recipe)

Ingredients:

- 1.5 – 2 oz. Small-batch bourbon
- 1 – 2 cubes Sugar in the Raw
- 2 dashes each Orange Bitters & Angostura Bitters
- 1/2 an Orange slice (1/4" thick)
- Section of Orange zest

Gear Needed:

- A good rocks glass with a wide bottom
- A bar spoon with a disc end
- Several large, solid ice cubes
- Cocktail napkin

Procedure:

- 1) Place the orange slice in the bottom of the rocks glass.
- 2) Place the cube(s) of sugar on a cocktail napkin and apply 2 dashes of each variety of bitters to the sugar. The cocktail napkin is there to absorb excess bitters
- 3) Add bitters-soaked sugar cube(s) to the glass and muddle together with only the pulp of the orange. Avoid the pith as it contains bitter elements. Muddling with the disc-end of the bar spoon makes this step easier.
- 4) Add one large ice cube to the glass along with half of the bourbon. Stir for 30 seconds.
- 5) Add one more ice cube and the rest of the bourbon. Stir briefly, then add the rest of the ice.
- 6) Cut a section of fresh orange peel with as little pith as possible, rim the glass with it and drop it into the drink. Enjoy!



Dan Crowell, cocktail enthusiast and self-avowed 'spirits nerd', hails from Omaha where he talks incessantly (even occasionally to other people) about the virtues of what he calls 'investigative imbibement'. An eternally fascinated student of the distillers' art, he encourages any like-minded individuals to engage him in a spirited discussion at <http://www.libationassociation.blogspot.com>.



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The State of the Cocktail:

V Mertz and the Artful Pairing of Food & Spirit

In my continuing quest to evaluate the state of the cocktail art here in Nebraska, I have discovered some applications of this art form that are truly unique in their approach and inspiring in their passionate attention to detail. V Mertz, one of this region's most highly regarded fine dining establishments, located in Omaha's Old Market, houses one of those unique and inspiring applications. The role of the cocktail in the dining experience at V Mertz meshes perfectly with the overall concept of the restaurant itself – a creatively conceived and impeccably executed culinary experience.

The following text is taken from my recent interview with Matt Stamp, General Manager at V Mertz.

FSM: Describe the restaurant

M.S.: V. Mertz is a contemporary fine dining restaurant and wine bar. We put an emphasis on intricate and artful cuisine, tasting menus, and we believe that we offer a considerate and thoughtful approach to food and wine pairing. We bake bread in house, offer an artisan cheese board, local Wagyu beef, and local produce in season; and we really try to support small growers and foragers, small ranchers, artisan producers and small production winemakers. We believe that our network of suppliers, in general, share our ethic of what fine dining should involve—from the table to the more intangible responsibilities to our guests. I know of no other restaurant in Omaha that spends the time and money to recycle glass, or compost vegetable waste, for instance.

FSM: What is your philosophy in terms of the overall bar & cocktail profile?

M.S.: I believe that the offerings of our

bar should stand alongside the selections on our wine list. I do not believe in offering liquors that do not have a place in dining. I think that our major focus here is on wine, and so the bar is necessarily diminished in a way. However, not everyone is interested in wine, and I want someone who is a scotch aficionado to be comfortable with our pairing suggestions with scotch, and experience a similar sort of harmonious pairing, for example. With cocktails, I want something clean and balanced, without too much cloying sweetness. I want to taste the base spirit, and I do not want it to be so over-developed that the intrinsic qualities of the liquor are lost. For me, less personality in cocktails is a preference, and I think makes a cocktail a more pleasing aperitif and precursor to wine and food.

“I do not believe in offering liquors that do not have a place in dining.”

FSM: What is your goal with the bar?

M.S.: Last year, we banned our bartenders from making Apple Martinis. I feel pretty good about that.

FSM: How do you implement your vision for the bar?

M.S.: In the past, we have worked up cocktail menus, but I'm trying to get away from that approach, and allow our cocktails to fluctuate more, as we do with our menus. I've been heavily involved with the bar and development of cocktails in the past, but now I'm trying to take a more hands-off

approach, and allow my bartenders the creativity and freedom to work on their own drinks.

FSM: What is your background?

M.S.: I have worked at V. Mertz for most of the last decade. I started out as a dishwasher, and slowly worked my way through most of the positions at the restaurant. Currently, I am the general manager and wine director, and I have recently passed the Advanced Sommelier Exam given by the Court of Master Sommeliers.

FSM: From where do you draw inspiration?

M.S.: In both wine and food, I want to challenge diners, but not in a way that becomes uncomfortable. For wine pairings, draw a lot of inspiration from my Chef and his food, obviously, but I also consider my ideal for a good sommelier. I've got a pairing right now for foie gras with quince and hazelnut. It's Grand Cru Sauternes. And you know what, anybody can do that. You don't need a sommelier to tell you that Sauternes and foie gras and quince is going to be a slam dunk. It's the more interesting pairing that I really strive for: like pumpkin bisque and red wine apples with Nebbiolo d'Alba, or Crab Boudin and heirloom tomato with Bouzeron Aligoté. I really enjoy moving diners beyond traditional varietals and expected wines, because there are a lot of really great wines out there if you look, and one can often find the same qualities that they really like about pinot noir, for instance, in something altogether different. And that makes a lot more memorable dining experience in my opinion, than just another bottle of Pinot X or Chardonnay Z. Is the next bottle of \$75 Napa Cab really going to change

our life? No.

FSM: Name some challenges associated with your approach.

M.S.: Well, if you've ever tried to talk somebody into drinking a Bouzeron Aligote, you'll have some challenges. I think that in the Bay Area, diners are very sensitive about moving out of their comfort zone. But we see a lot of willing guests who do a tasting menu, or go with something they wouldn't normally order when they came in with hearts set on our Peppersteak, for instance. I think that in the end these guests become more discerning diners, and expect more not just from us, but from every restaurant in the fine dining category.

FSM: Describe the response you've received from customers.

M.S.: I would say that our customer response to our food and wine has been really overwhelming. At the bar, we utilize classic recipes for a lot of cocktails. Our margaritas, if someone requests one, are made from Don Julio Reposado, Grand Marnier, simple syrup and fresh lime juice. That's a solid margarita. But you can't get one made like that in most restaurants, they get overwhelmed with Rose's Lime or a box mix and they taste like candy. Sometimes, that is what someone wants and they are satisfied with ours. But most of the time, we get a really favorable response. It tastes balanced, and you can taste the tequila. And its great tequila!

FSM: How do you approach bar staff training? What about wait staff spirits training?

M.S.: We have a very small bar and wait staff, and we try to train continuously, both with set events such as training seminars but also with more informal tastings. Tasting is key, really, for anyone in this business to sell confidently. And the Court of Master Sommeliers takes education very seriously, and I try to extend this philosophy with my staff.

FSM: Does the bar itself get busy?

M.S.: Unfortunately, we are graced with a aesthetically pleasing but somewhat uncomfortably-designed bar. So while the bar may get busy on some nights, with late post-dinner dessert crowds, etc., it is really more of decoration, and most of the drinks we pour are being served to tables. The bar only has 6 barstools. But for someone looking for a quiet and subdued bar setting, I think it's pretty perfect. You always get plenty of attention!

FSM: Do you create cocktails with specific food pairing applications in mind?

M.S.: Yes, absolutely. And we try to keep seasonality in mind with our cocktails as well. For instance, this summer we did a Belvedere cocktail with cucumber water, black lava sea salt, simple syrup and lemon juice. It had perfect balance, and was attuned to the cuisine of the moment: light, summery flavors.

“Next time you go out, don't settle for just another Californian cabernet.”

FSM: Are any of your bar ingredients produced in-house?

M.S.: Fruit purees, fresh citrus, liquor infusions, etc. We ran a Gibson for a while where we were making our own “cocktail” onions, and a truffle-infused vodka accompanied by house-made rosemary ice cubes, and we ran a really nice Sangria, made in house (with Spatlese-quality Riesling), this past summer. We are currently looking at making mulled wine and sodas in-house.

FSM: What do you have in the works for the near future?

M.S.: We're experimenting with some allspice infusions, and we're definitely going to do some mulled wine for the winter. House-made egg nog around Christmastime is always a favorite.

FSM: What do you consider to be your signature drink?

M.S.: I'm really trying to get V. Mertz away from the idea of signature anything. I think that is a very constraining concept for a restaurant that prides itself on good, seasonal food. I want the signature to be V.

Mertz, and a guest to be comfortable knowing that all of our menus, whether food or drink, are crafted with careful consideration for the final product and, ultimately, the guest's enjoyment.

FSM: What's your 'can't miss' drink / liqueur / spirit?

M.S.: I'm going to go with Achel Trap-pist Extra. A beer. For spirits, I'm a pretty big fan of fiery, rustic Armagnac. Château Laubade produces some very nice examples

FSM: What's the most recent product development that has inspired you?

M.S.: I really love the explosion of interest in good sake.

FSM: What do you drink when you go out?

M.S.: Wine, or Johnnie Walker Black Label. It's too smooth.

FSM: Is there a cocktail / product / category you wish every customer would try?

M.S.: Good grappa. We just picked up the Moscato di Poli and it is fantastic.

FSM: What's your best-selling cocktail?

M.S.: Well, we sell an awful lot of Cosmopolitans. Some things never change.

FSM: Do you use a cocktail list? Does the content change regularly?

M.S.: In the past we used a list but currently we prefer the approach of hand-selling a few very seasonal cocktails.

FSM: What would you like to tell the folks at home?

M.S.: Next time you go out, don't settle for just another Californian cabernet.



THE DUMPSTER

Saying It With Meat

by Michael Campbell

At Christmas we often show our love with salami. I don't know how Hillshire Farms survives the rest of the year, but during the Christmas season business booms as neatly packaged grassy nests of unrefrigerated salami and warm wet cheeses are exchanged, often multiple times.

How salami came to be a customary gift at Christmas has been forgotten, but I suppose it has something to do with the end of the year and having to get rid of all those leftover pig parts that have been piling up since we made 4th of July hot dogs. I've

when the pastor laid a thin wafer on my tongue that was as pleasing as parchment. He said, "Peace be with you," and I was supposed to respond, "And also with you," but it came out "ack." I couldn't stop myself from imagining it was the peeled sunburn of Christ. The pastor instructed me to keep my tongue sticking out for a moment, which was fine with me.

Why not use Nilla wafers? Or better yet, offer little chocolate Jesuses? I'd be happy to stand in line for that, or chocolate crosses or fish--any of the popular logos. God is good.

I've never heard of anyone giving his sweetheart a big Valentine's salami, even though that symbolism makes way more sense.

ever heard of anyone giving his sweetheart a big Valentine's salami, even though that symbolism makes way more sense.

On Halloween we offer chocolates to the walking dead. Despite countless educational horror films which plainly demonstrate that monsters seek flesh, brains, and blood (salami, basically) we continue to try to placate them with a peanut-butter cup.

But while chocolate may not be ideal for a holiday of fending off monsters, it might work splendidly for Sunday Communion.

The celebration of Communion varies greatly. At my church they baked fresh bread and passed it around. It symbolized the body of Christ, which in this case was still warm. You tore off a chunk as it went by, and chased it with a sip of wine. I visited a church down the street and was startled

Communion chocolate would be a natural pairing with wine, yet meanwhile we're handing out bite-size Snickers to the other risen dead.

At Easter, many celebrate the fertility season by biting the head off a chocolate rabbit. Then they move on to the good parts of a pig.

For Passover we eat bitter herbs, just to remind ourselves how bad food can get, not counting Manischewitz. The Jewish find this symbolic reminder meaningful, while Gentiles get stuck with a salami.

To the Jewish, food must be kosher; to Muslims it must be halal, which is to say that it must be acceptable to God. In neither case will God accept a salami.

During Ramadan, the power of food is symbolized by its absence, which is to say

you don't get any. One of the benefits of a thirty-day fast is that, when you end it, even garbanzo beans taste great.

Thanksgiving is the only holiday where the food makes any symbolic sense. We celebrate being big, fat, rich Americans by eating big, fat and rich food. As our Halloween zombies would quip, that's a no-brainer.

Fourth of July is second only to Halloween in the weird use of sweets, as we toe up to the curb to admire a colorful parade of firetrucks and tanks while encouraging our confused children to leap into the oncoming traffic in pursuit of cheap candy thrown by strangers.

New Year's Day: perfect for symbols of new life. We should eat eggs and caviar and enjoy the arousing qualities of chocolate. Heck, a salami would fit great here. Instead we start our new year eating aspirin.

Perhaps it's not about logic. I bought four bags of Halloween candy last year, and only half made it to the front door thanks to my "quality control sampling." I know this: if holiday food made sense and it was a big bowl of Halloween brains in my fridge, I wouldn't be tempted to cheat.



Michael Campbell, owner of Mick's Music & Bar in Omaha, is a singer/songwriter and humorist. His CD *Used Without Permission* is available in stores, and his weekly essays can

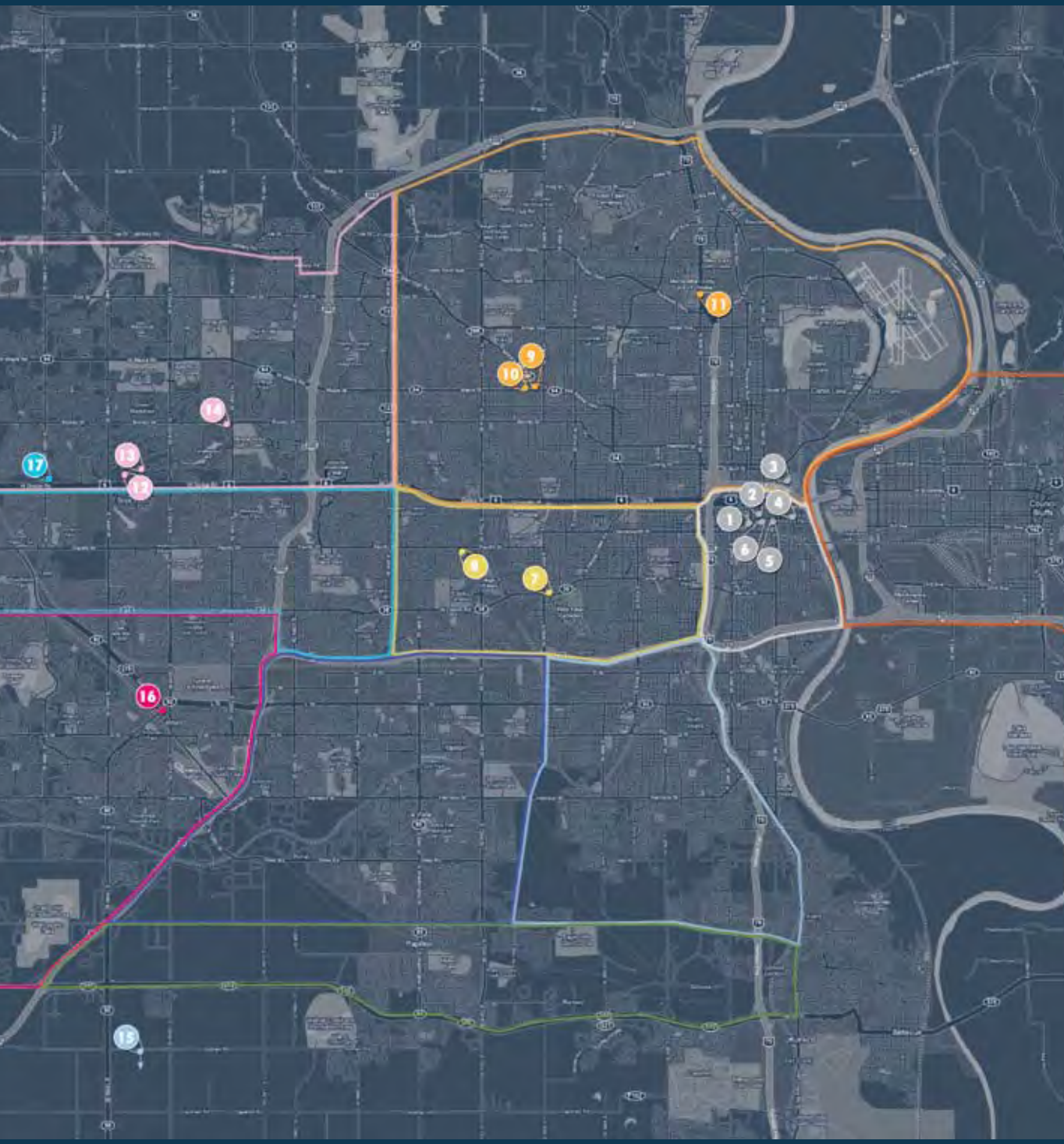
be found at PickyMick.blogspot.com. He is the author of *Are You Going To Eat That?*, a collection of 50 humor essays.

Blackout! & more.



SELECTED OMAHA RESTAURANTS, BARS & LOUNGES

- North Omaha
- Northwest Omaha
- South Omaha
- South Central Omaha
- Bellevue
- South West Omaha
- West Omaha





1
The Quicks has a menu centered in a
thern, Cajun and Southwestern style.
ared with chef and owner Rene Orduna's
twist, their loyal and valued patrons have
yed eating the food as much as they have
yed making it for the past twelve years.
've always been a small eatery, and are
ntly serving breakfast and lunch, and
ning to their dinner hours soon.

M's Pub

402-342-2550
422 S. 11th Street



4
Pub has been serving Omaha's
liminating diners in the heart of the Old
ket for over 33 years. Our cutting edge,
rd winning cuisine is complemented by
Wine Spectator-recognized wine list, and
ed by our knowledgeable & courteous
! Make reservations today and join us...

Downtown - BARS & RESTAURANTS

BO'S	402-341-8032
MANA'S	402-342-9902
AD	402-345-4488
	402-884-6985
LOUNGE	402-884-1231
CROWN	402-346-8242
X	402-346-4110
ME INN	402-341-4473
RTH CAFE	402-346-6924
SANDWICH SHOP	402-422-1040
'S	402-345-8466
PIZZA	402-345-3438
IER	402-341-9870



2
The Flatiron Cafe's staff has been happily
serving the theater crowd, business travelers
and those celebrating special occasions
since 1995. Chef Jennifer Coco oversees the
preparation of the evenings special dishes.
Wine specialist Adam Betts is always on the
look out for exceptional wines to add to her
list. Proprietors Steve and Kathleen Jamroz
keep it all together and host the finest dinner
parties nightly.

5 Vivace

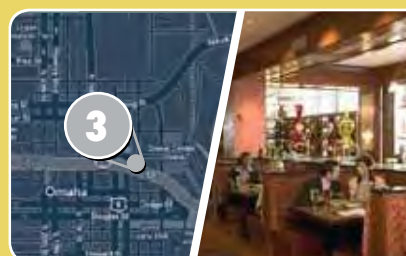
402-342-2050
1110 Howard Street



5
The owners of M's Pub opened Vivace over
thirteen years ago to critical and public
acclaim. Serving contemporary Italian fare
accented by a Mediterranean flair, the menu is
complemented by a Wine Spectator Award-
winning wine list, welcoming & attentive
service, and the "most beautiful dining room in
the Old Market"! Reservations honored @
www.OpenTable.com

Central - BARS & RESTAURANTS

BROTHER'S LOUNGE	402-553-5822
THE 49 R	402-554-5841
THE DOWNUNDER	402-342-3806
THE ELBOW ROOM	402-556-0867
CANIGLIA'S VENICE INN	402-556-3111
GERDA'S BAKERY	402-553-6774
GOLDBERGS	402-556-2006
GORAT'S STEAK HOUSE	402-551-3733
HARKERT'S BAR-B-Q	402-554-0102
JONESY'S TACO HOUSE	402-551-6088
LA CASA PIZZARIA	402-556-6464
LITHUANIAN BAKERY & KAFE	402-391-3503
MCKENNA'S	402-393-7427



3
Award winning Chef Glenn Wheeler invites
you to enjoy selections from his wonderful
menu. Liberty Tavern, located inside the Hilton
Omaha, serves great American food and spir
in a comfortable, casual atmosphere with
genuine hospitality. A perfect choice for those
going to the Qwest Center or just looking for
relaxing dining experience, the Liberty Tavern
offers complimentary parking at the Hilton.

6 Cubby's Old Market Grocery

402-341-2...
601 S. 13th Str



6
The original downtown grocery & deli.
Featuring an eclectic domestic and imported
cheese selection; 130+ craft, micro and impo
beers; Boar's Head meats & cheeses and an
outstanding collection of wines. Custom cater
gourmet & specialty groceries, & fresh made
deli salads. Monthly food & wine tastings.

North - BARS & RESTAURANTS

FULL HOUSE BAR	402-558-3...
HOMY INN	402-554-5...
MICK'S MUSIC & BAR	402-502-2...
MUSETTE BAR	402-554-5...
NIFTY BAR & GRILL	402-933-9...
ALPINE INN	402-451-9...
CAMILLE'S SIDEWALK CAFE	402-731-9...
ESPAÑA	402-505-9...
HAPPY FAMILY RESTAURANT	402-934-5...
JIM'S RIB HAVEN	402-451-6...
JOE'S CAFE	402-556-9...
LEO'S DINER	402-553-2...
LISA'S RADIAL CAFE	402-551-2...
RAZZY'S SANDWICH SHOPPE	402-397-5...



A family owned Omaha tradition since 1957. The whole family will love this original diner's look and taste. The menu features all the classic staples, from hot beef and pork tenderloin to made-from-scratch pies and homemade ice cream. Serving breakfast at 7am, the dinner menu features hand-cut steaks through 9:30pm.

0 Jake's Cigars & Spirits

402-934-9633
6206 Maple Street



Jake's Cigars & Spirits is an upscale, yet unpretentious smoke shop and liquor store. Smokers are met by a walk-in humidor as well as the most extensive line of import and premium cigarettes in Omaha. If spirits is more of what suits your fancy then peruse our collection of eclectic and hard to find wines, liquors and beers. Have a cocktail in our stylish and intimate lounge, you'll feel right at home whether you're drinking a cosmo, a Cabernet, or a Corona.

Northwest - BARS & RESTAURANTS

DRARY PUB	402-571-6262
ORTH SHORE	402-571-1150
MILL	402-493-1456
OPPIA	402-392-2806
S DUGOUT	402-498-8855
N CARMELO'S PIZZERIA	402-289-9800
O JAPANESE CUISINE	402-933-0091
LYWOOD DINER	402-445-8000
NG KONG CAFE	402-493-8383
EEP	402-408-1728
OLTAIRE	402-934-9374
HTHOUSE BAR & GRILL	402-498-3824
ZONE BBQ	402-431-9663



Spirit World is a gourmet deli and specialty spirits store located in midtown Omaha. Our knowledgeable and loyal staff has the experience and love of food, wine and spirits to help you make the perfect selection. The gourmet deli offers a variety of the freshest homemade salads, soups and sandwiches. In the evenings, enjoy a glass or bottle of wine with a cheese plate, appetizer or entree.

11 Sage Student Bistro

402-457-2328
30th and Fort Streets

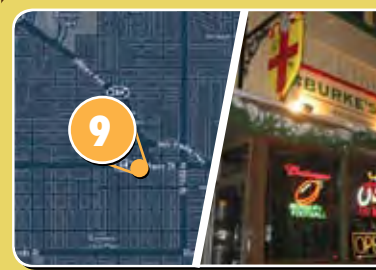


Providing guest-centered learning experiences, Sage Student Bistro is an integral force for the Institute for Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College (MCC). Each visit is an opportunity for our faculty to create a training exercise for the benefit of instruction. Customer feedback and gratuity provide valuable support to the learning community at MCC's Institute for the Culinary Arts. www.mccneb.edu/bistro

Bistro Hours - Mon. - Thurs. 6 - 8:30 p.m.

South - BARS & RESTAURANTS

BG'S UNDER THE BRIDGE	402-734-9068
BROWN DERBY BAR	402-734-6198
DARBY'S TAVERN	402-733-9696
DONOHUE'S PUB	402-738-9780
JOHNNY Z'S	402-733-9602
HOMESTEAD CAFÉ	402-738-9989
HOWARD'S CHARRO CAFE	402-731-3776
JOE TESS' PLACE	402-731-7278
JOHNNY'S CAFÉ	402-731-4774
JOHN'S GRECIAN DELIGHT	402-731-8022
KAHN'S MONGOLIAN BBQ	402-731-4800
TAQUERIA TIAJUANA	402-731-1281
THAI KITCHEN	402-733-0579



A quiet neighborhood sports bar with a flair. Enjoy a large selection of beer on tap, a vast variety of ice cold bottled Micro Brews. Have a great conversation and play Touchdown Tunes Jukebox, Golden Tee Live 2008, Strike Bowling, Keno, or watch your favorite Sports on one of our 13 TVs. Stop in today!

12 Charleston's

402-438-1385
13851 1st Natl. Blvd



Charleston's is a casual, upbeat restaurant with a modestly priced menu featuring traditional American items prepared from scratch. From Hard-wood grilled steaks, seafood, prime chicken, ribs, salads, burgers, sandwiches, kids menu, Charleston's has something for everyone. The atmosphere is warm, cozy, and inviting utilizing dark woods and gas lighting to create a handsome, understated décor. With an emphasis on service, Charleston's is here for you.

Bellevue - BARS & RESTAURANTS

DOUG'S TOWN TAVERN	402-289-1385
HAM'S BELLEVUE BAR	402-289-1385
JAMMER'S PUB	402-289-1385
PHARAOH'S	402-933-0091
PAT AND WALLY'S	402-289-1385
AMARILLO	402-571-6262
CHANDLER INN PIZZA	402-731-3776
CHINA CAFE	402-289-1385
CHINA STAR	402-289-1385
LUMS RESTAURANT	402-731-3776
NETTIES FINE MEXICAN FOOD	402-731-3776
STELLA'S HAMBURGERS	402-289-1385
VARSITY SPORTS CAFÉ	402-933-0091



Biaggi's casual Italian restaurant offers an extensive selection of pastas, soups & breads, pizza, seafood, steaks and desserts. Enjoy large portions of affordably-priced dishes prepared with the freshest ingredients available in a comfortable, relaxing atmosphere. Our private event room and wine cellar are perfect to make any gathering an event to remember.

Millard Roadhouse

402-891-9292
13325 Millard Ave.



Millard family restaurant specializing in all our favorite home style foods like broasted chicken, liver & onions, chicken fried steak as well as chicken & homemade mashed potatoes. We also have great appetizers, salads and sandwiches. There's a game room available and we offer one of Omaha's largest children's menu. Weekdays from 11-2 join us for our lunch buffet, and on Sunday from 10-2 for our brunch buffet.

Central - BARS & RESTAURANTS

PHY'S LOUNGE	402-339-7170
TON KENO	402-592-3008
O'CASEY'S	402-593-1746
KER'S	402-331-9900
R CREEK	402-331-4579
OWNER BAR	402-733-9225
ONY'S	
AURANT & LOUNGE	402-331-7575
DMOTHER'S	402-339-6633
NY SORTINO'S PIZZA	402-339-5050
Y'S DELI	402-537-9600
AN COIN PIZZA	402-339-1944
NTIS RESTAURANT	402-331-4999
ITY SPORTS CAFE	402-339-7003



Taxi's Grille is meant to be a neighborhood spot. Developed by Mac Thompsen and Bill Johnette, owners of The Neon Goose, the atmosphere and menu are contemporary casual. The menu is large with soups, specialty salads and sandwiches, comfort foods, fresh seafood and steaks. Prix Fixe items available nightly. Tuesday and Wednesday are half price bottle wines. Brunch is always popular with Egg Benedict dishes, omelettes, quiches and more. Call ahead to put your name in.

17 Le Voltaire

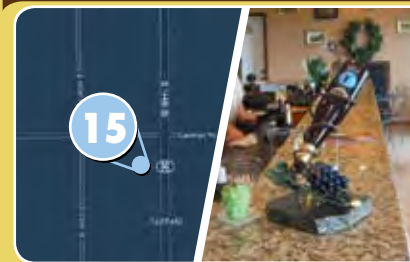
402-934-9374
569 N. 155th Plaza



Recognized as one of Omaha's finest restaurants, Le Voltaire's features classical French cuisine with a flair. The Executive Chef and Owner, Cédric S. Fichépain is committed to providing an atmosphere of understated elegance, fine service and extraordinary cuisine. Each dish is prepared using the freshest flavors of the season and ingredients of the highest quality. The wine list is constantly updated to represent the best wine selections from the regions of France.

Southwest - BARS & RESTAURANTS

PAT'S PUB	402-934-4242
PICCOLO'S BAR	402-895-9988
RATIGANS	402-895-3311
THE BEST PUB	402-891-9888
WHY-NOT LOUNGE	402-895-9990
CHINA BISTRO	402-895-5888
CRACKER BARREL	402-891-8665
DON & MILLIE'S	402-991-9112
FINNEGAN'S	402-333-6181
FRANK'S TREEHOUSE	402-731-3297
FUDDRUCKERS	402-932-7790
GREAT WALL, THE	402-895-3811



Soaring Wings is a family owned operation. The land was purchased in 2001, and operations in the Vineyard began in March of 2002 with winery operations commencing in 2003. Sharon and Jim Shaw are the sole owners. Making high quality wine that competes on the international level is our goal. We have won over 80 medals in international wine competitions in the last 4 years. We have 7 acres of grapes at our winery site with an additional 40 acres under contract.

Want to see
your bar
or restaurant
listed?

Give us a call at 403-203-6144
or email at info@fsmomaha.com

FOOD & Spirits
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West - BARS & RESTAURANTS

MIC'S KARAOKE BAR	402-934-
NO WHERE BAR	402-502-
OBSERVATORY LOUNGE	402-334-
REDNECK SALOON	402-733-
SHARK CLUB	402-397-
THE REEL MARTINI BAR	402-884-
THE DRAFT HOUSE	402-884-
CHEEBURGER CHEEBURGER	402-884-
CHEESEBURGER IN PARADISE	402-289-
CHINA GARDEN	402-397-
CHIPOTLE	402-697-
CICI'S PIZZA	402-991-

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Join U.S. Foodservice® in the fight against hunger with *Recipes from the Heart*, our exclusive cookbook benefitting America's Second Harvest—The Nation's Food Bank Network. Straight from the hearts and the kitchens of U.S. Foodservice associates, *Recipes from the Heart* helps fight hunger in our own backyard. As part of the U.S. Foodservice Full Plates, Full Lives™ campaign, all net proceeds will be donated to America's Second Harvest. So eat well and feel good.

Order your copy by visiting FullPlatesFullLives.com to enjoy this unique recipe collection that nourishes both body and soul.

