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SEVEN DAYS

VERMONT'S ALTERNATIVE WEBWEEKLY

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Tue, Aug 16, 2005

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annual guide to readers' picks SEVEN-DAYSIES

food & drink - arts & entertainment - services & stuff - media & politics - travel & recreation

1. Best place to have dinner if you're paying

a. Inside Chittenden County:

WINNER

American Flatbread
Burlington Hearth

RUNNER-UP

Papa Frank's Italian
Restaurant

b. Outside Chittenden County:

WINNER

Black Sheep Bistro

RUNNER-UP

Sarducci's

2. Best place to have dinner if they're paying

a. Inside Chittenden County:

WINNER

A Single Pebble

RUNNER-UP

Trattoria Delia

/food & drink

Burlington's **American Flatbread** is on the rise. Last summer at this time, the new eatery was just opening its doors across from City Hall Park. This year, it came out on top in two crucial categories: It's the best place to have dinner in Chittenden County if *you're* paying, suggesting affordability and a dining demographic broad enough to include babes *and* babies.

In a larger upset, though, the restaurant beat out long-loved **Leonardo's** for best pizza. Lucky for Leo, Flatbread doesn't deliver, but it's part of a successful franchise -- out of Waitsfield -- that manufactures the best frozen pizza on the planet. So, if you can't get in to the restaurant on a weekend night, you can always swing by City Market and pick up a cold one.

Outside of Chittenden County, the cheap eater's dining destination of choice is still the **Black Sheep Bistro** in Vergennes. Somehow -- in the dead of winter? -- Chef Michel Mahe also found time this year to design the menu for a new restaurant-nightclub in Montpelier: After seven months in operation, the popular Black Door Bar & Bistro is already on our runner-up radar.



'RED' ALERT Is it a coincidence that the "best bar in Burlington," which references Moscow, is directly across from City Hall? **Red Square** is all about democracy. If the front room is too raucous, mosey on back to a big cushy booth, or a private curtained alcove, or an outdoor table in the alley. The bevies will find you, and so will the music . . . PHOTO: MATTHEW THORSEN

b. Outside Chittenden
County:

WINNER
Sarducci's
RÜNNERS-UP
(tie) Black Sheep
Bistro/Black Door Bar &
Bistro

3. Best Sunday brunch

a. Inside Chittenden
County:

WINNER
Sneakers Bistro & Cafe
RÜNNER-UP
Penny Cluse Cafe

b. Outside Chittenden
County:

WINNER
Main Street Grill & Bar
RUNNER-UP
Mist Grill

4. Best breakfast spot

a. Inside Chittenden
County:

WINNER
Penny Cluse
RÜNNER-UP
Sneakers

b. Outside Chittenden
County:

WINNER
River Run Restaurant
RUNNER-UP
Mist Grill

5. Best place to do lunch

a. Inside Chittenden
County:

WINNER
Cobblestone Deli

b. Outside Chittenden
County:

WINNER
Eat Good Food

Sarducci's won hands-down, though, for best place to have dinner outside Chittenden County if someone else is picking up the tab. A surprising outcome, perhaps, since dining there doesn't exactly break the bank. Conoscenti, Chef's Table, Christophe's -- now *those* are expense-account eateries. Is selecting Sarducci's an indication of economic decline or a measure of Montpelier's meal-time modesty? Maybe Vermont diners just can't get enough of those wood-fired wonders.

A Single Pebble turns out Asian delicacies from the other side of the world and still ranks number one in Chittenden County for "best place to have dinner if they're paying." They could wok around the clock and still have to turn people away. Last summer, *Vermont* magazine put chef-owner Steve Bogart on its cover and proclaimed the Pebble "the best restaurant in the great, green state of Vermont."

The competition is stiffer in the a.m. arena -- but with the closing of Waterbury's Mist Grill, the best-breakfast battle is down a serious contender. Last year **Penny Cluse** cleaned up in Chittenden County. This year **Sneakers** -- home of the morning "Jump Start" -- chased down the prize for "best Sunday brunch." For breakfast, Penny Cluse is still the chorizo-and-cheese champ.

If you want catfish and grits first thing, go and get it at **River Run**. The best beyond-Burlington breakfast is plainly in Plainfield. For brunch, central Vermonters are sticking with the NECI-run **Main Street Bar & Grill**.

The lunch crowd is loyal, too: Readers continue to favor flavors at **Eat Good Food** in Vergennes, **Cobblestone Deli** in Burlington, and, for veggie fare, **Stone Soup**. No time to sit at a table? The pickiest palates grab gourmet-to-go from **Fresh Market** or shop for natural goodies by the careful at City Market. Burlington's best bakery -- **Mirabelles** -- makes sweet and savory croissants.

On-the-go eaters have discovered **Hong's Chinese Dumplings** on Church Street. The proprietor rolls and fries 'em while you wait. Along with the pork-and-chicken and crab-and-cream cheese, she's got meatless varieties.

Technically speaking, **Nectar's** famous fries -- *sans* gravy - - are also veggie. This retro restaurant is flexible *and* fast. More importantly, it serves until 2 a.m., and the walk-up window stays open for 30 minutes after that. For after-



CONFECTION PERFECTION The pastry case at **Mirabelles** is food-fantasy material. If the triple-chocolate mousse cake doesn't suck you in, the mouth-watering cookies, croissants or candies surely will. New England Culinary Institute grads Andrew Silva and Alison Lane share the flour power at Burlington's best bakery, but they also make great soups, sandwiches and salads for lunch. PHOTO: MATTHEW THORSEN



HAMMING IT UP Charming, historic and friendly, **Cobblestone Deli** on Battery Street puts a fresh twist on the sandwich scene. The BLT&G -- bacon, lettuce, tomato and guacamole -- is a favorite. Even the liverwurst on rye, aka "The Donald Dupont," has its fans. They also serve up hot breakfast items every day except Tuesday and Wednesday. PHOTO: MATTHEW THORSEN

RUNNER-UP
Sarducci's

6. Best late-night food:

WINNER
Nectar's
RUNNER-UP
Kountry Kart Deli

7. Best Vermont beer:

WINNER
Magic Hat Brewing Co.
RUNNER-UP
Long Trail Brewing Co.

8. Best veggie fare:

WINNER
Stone Soup

9. Best pizza:

WINNER
American Flatbread
Burlington Hearth
RUNNER-UP
Leonardo's Pizza

10. Best bar:

WINNER
Red Square
RUNNER-UP
Ri Ra The Irish Pub

11. Best apres-ski:

WINNER
The Shed Restaurant &
Brewery
RUNNER-UP
The Matterhorn Restaurant

12. Best coffeehouse:

WINNER
Muddy Waters
RUNNER-UP
Uncommon Grounds

13. Best bakery:

WINNER
Mirabelles
RUNNER-UP

hours eating, it's definitely, well, the best.

Apres ski? This year, **The Shed** overtook The Matterhorn in a classic Daysie flip-flop.

In Burlington, **Red Square** is the watering hole of choice --

Ri Ra The Irish Pub came in a close second. No doubt both bars sell plenty of **Magic Hat**, voted "best Vermont beer." For wine, though, readers prefer the classy atmosphere of **Wine Works**.

Last year, the grape escape was also runner-up for "best first-date spot." So when the Waiting Room went away, we expected Wine Works would take its place. Or even **Muddy Waters**, the area's best coffeehouse, where a living-room ambiance lends itself to intimate exchange.

In fact, the number-one hot spot in northwestern Vermont is the Burlington Waterfront. The lake is a lure for wannabe lovers. That should be good news for Roque's, Taste or Breakwater -- except most people didn't mention a food source. So, we're assuming, *al fresco*? Depending on the season, that could be a real ice breaker.



ITALIAN JOB They don't waste a lot of time explaining the difference between *primi* and *secondi* at **Sarducci's** Italian restaurant. You can get pasta, pizza or steak at Montpelier's popular -- and populist -- trattoria. And judging from the lines, people do. In winter, it's a legislative hangout. In summer, families flock to the place, and the riverside seating is *molto romantico*. PHOTO: jeb wallace-brodeur



STOCKED MARKET Why negotiate a big-box grocery store when you can get it all at **City Market**? Burlington's downtown food emporium is a reliable source of everything fresh, local and organic. Oh, and did we mention more than a dozen varieties of trail mix? PHOTO: MATTHEW THORSEN

Klinger's Bread Company

14. Best natural foods market:

WINNER

City Market

RUNNER-UP

Healthy Living

15. Greatest gourmet shop:

WINNER

Cheese Outlet/Fresh Market

RUNNER-UP

Cheese Traders and Wine Sellers

16. Best street eats:

WINNER

Hong's Chinese Dumplings

RUNNER-UP

Lois Bodoky, Hot Dog Lady

17. Best wine seller:

WINNER

RUNNER-UP

Village Wine and Coffee

18. Best first-date spot:

WINNER

Burlington Waterfront



SECONDS FLATBREAD It's not as funky as the one in Waitsfield. Burlington's **American Flatbread** has a slicker interior -- no outdoor bonfires -- and the lefty politics are toned way down. But the wood-fired pizza oven puts out the same incredible pies with all-Vermont ingredients.



A typical special: "chorizo with Miskell tomatoes, Grafton cheddar cheese, arugula and leeks." PHOTO: MATTHEW THORSEN



GOOD SERVE There's a basketball theme at **Sneakers**, an intimate neighborhood eatery that turns into a booming brunch spot every weekend. Construction be damned, egg seekers of all stripes come to Winooski for California Benedict and Kahlua batter-dipped french toast. The problem is getting a seat. At least you can get coffee outdoors while you wait. PHOTO: JORDAN SILVERMAN



OPEN SESAME Sino the times? **Hong's Chinese Dumplings** beat out the long-celebrated Hot Dog Lady in this year's street-eats category. Some voters even referred to her as "The Dumpling Lady." But instead of bringing beef and buns together, Yu Hong deals in dough. Rolls it out right in front of you. Even the sauces are homemade. PHOTO: MATTHEW THORSEN

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