

Best of the Quad Cities 2005: Food & Drink

Written by No Author

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Restaurant that opened in 2005 1. The Brown Bottle 2. Buffalo Wild Wings Grill & Bar 3. Pluckers Grill & Bar (tie) 3. San Francisco Oven (tie) Best restaurant opened in 2005 - The Brown Bottle If you're looking for a romantic dining spot to take your date for Valentine's Day, consider The Brown Bottle. Voted the Quad Cities' best restaurant opened in 2005, the Brown Bottle (readers may be familiar with the one in Iowa City) opened up on November 21 at 1624 Fifth Avenue in Moline – down the street from John Deere Commons.

Offering hearty Italian food, the Brown Bottle restaurant's most popular entrées are lasagna, manicotti, and all other pasta and marinara dishes. "The lasagna is a classic; that recipe hasn't changed in 30 years," said Nick Zuehlke, the manager of the Moline restaurant. "We make our marinara sauce fresh every day." He also said that the Bottle has excellent steaks and seafood, and its most popular desserts are tiramisu and brownie pie.

The Brown Bottle has been owned and operated since 1974 by Dave and Gina Landau. The Moline restaurant is the fifth one to open, and the first one ever in Illinois. "We've had a great response," said Zuehlke. "People seem to be happy to have us on the Illinois side." Other Brown Bottle locations include North Liberty, Waterloo, and Cedar Falls. For reservations, call (309)736-9288.

Johanna Welzenbach-Hilliard

Asian restaurant

1. Exotic Thai Restaurant
2. Hi Ho Mongolian Grill
3. Yen Ching

Best Asian restaurant - Exotic Thai

Mun Luangruang opened her first **Exotic Thai** restaurant in Davenport (2303 East 53rd Street) in 2001, and her second in

Moline (3922 38th Avenue) in 2004. "And hopefully there will be more!" she says with a

beaming grin. The *Reader* readers who named Exotic Thai the area's best place for Asian food would seem to hope so, too. Luanguang attributes much of Exotic Thai's popularity to the fact that Thai food is "very healthy," and acknowledges that the appeal of Thai cooking lies in it being "a combination of Indian and Chinese and Vietnamese" traditions, incorporating "the best of all of them." And speaking of bests, what would be the ideal Exotic Thai dinner for Luanguang herself? Looking through the menu, she points at the listing for Yum Nua, a traditional Thai-style lettuce salad that's "spicy and sour and salty and sweet. I really like that. And the Yum Yai [a lettuce salad topped with julienne chicken and shrimp]." And what would be her ideal appetizer? She peruses the menu again. "The Heavenly Shrimp is very good," she says. "But the steamed dumplings are very good, too. And the Sa-Te [grilled and marinated chicken skewers]!" Luanguang laughs, and flashes another smile. "There are just so many!"

– Mike Schulz

Italian restaurant

1. Biaggi's Ristorante Italiano
2. Olive Garden Italian Restaurant
3. Lunardi's

Mexican restaurant

1. Azteca
2. Rudy's Tacos
3. La Flama

Best Mexican restaurant – Azteca

"If the customers are happy," says **Azteca** owner Alvaro Villalpando, "then we're happy." And it's impossible to imagine any Mexican-food lover *not* being happy after a visit to Azteca (located at 4811 North Brady Street in Davenport). Villalpando – whose staff of 10 includes his wife and brother – raves about the mariachi band that performs twice a month for his clientele, and about his restaurant's drink specials, which include 12-ounce margaritas for \$1.75 and 99-cent draft beers. But he quickly adds that "*everything* is special," and a perusal of Azteca's offerings – including a vast selection of tacos, burritos, fajitas, enchiladas, chalupas, tamales, and quesadillas – more than backs up his claim. Consider the numbers: At Azteca, you'll find 40 special-combination dinner options, reasonably priced from \$5.25 to \$15.95 (and that price is for fajitas for *two*). There are 30 combination plates available. Ten lunch specials. Twenty-four side dishes. Eight brands of Mexican beer. Eight domestics. Ten different brands of *tequila*, for Pete's sake. And when you ask Villalpando what makes Azteca stand out among so many Mexican-food competitors in the area, his answer lies in another number: "Because we're the best," he says. "*Numero uno*." For more information, call (563)386-6689.

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– Mike Schulz

Upscale dining

1. Johnny's Italian Steakhouse
2. Centro Restaurant
3. Red Crow Grille

Store or restaurant for health/vegetarian food

1. Greatest Grains
2. Hy-Vee Food Stores
3. Heritage Natural Foods

Best store or restaurant for health/vegetarian food - Greatest Grains

When many folks think of **Greatest Grains**, health-food fanatics, vegetarians, and even hippies come to mind

But the *River Cities' Reader's* 2005 winner for best store or restaurant for health/vegetarian food offers something for everyone. From organically grown foods to daily lunch and dinner specials to earth-friendly cleaners to dietary supplements, Greatest Grains is a one-stop grocery store. You can even find pet foods and hemp products on its shelves. And where else can you find a cold can of ginger ale?

Members of the *Reader* staff rave about Greatest Grains' fresh pizza at lunchtime, but Amy of Davenport prefers a frozen pizza to take home and cook at her convenience. Pastor Paul Tweeten and his wife Ruth shop Greatest Grains for its bulk fruits, grains, and granola, and also are frequent lunch patrons.

Manager Julie Martens said: "We owe our success to our loyal customers, who have supported Greatest Grains for 27 years. I invite new customers to stop in and give us a try. We can also cater your party!"

Greatest Grains, located at 1600 Harrison Street in Davenport, is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., Saturday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. You can find the store on the Web at (<http://www.greatestgrains.com>) , and the phone number is (563)323-7521.

–Rick Martin

Deli

1. The Hungry Hobo
2. Arthur's Garden Deli
3. Subway

Pizza

1. Harris Pizza

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2. Happy Joe's Pizza & Ice Cream Parlor
3. Uncle Bill's Pizza

Best pizza - Harris Pizza

Harris Pizza proclaims to have "the finest pizza in the world." *That* claim is questionable, but there's no doubt that Harris is the most popular pizza in the Quad Cities. The company was founded in Rock Island by Leonard and Marry Harris in 1960 and has expanded to five shops in that city, Davenport, and Bettendorf. Over the past 45 years, Harris has also enlarged its menu from the pizza that made its name, now offering a full lunch and dinner menu. The company's press materials note that Harris doesn't believe in cutting corners when making its famous pies. "We still make pizza the old-fashioned way, using top-quality, fresh ingredients," a press release said. The store offers hand-tossed, thin, thick, and pan crusts; grinds its own meats; and uses its own recipe and spice mixture for its sauce. Harris' daughter Kathleen Mosley has taken over as president (her father passed away in 1999), but the company's mission is still to serve "the finest pizza in the world" to loyal Quad Cities customers.

– Jesse Virgil

Bakery/breads

1. Panera Bread
2. Great Harvest Bread Company
3. Olde Town Bakery

Seafood

1. Red Lobster Restaurants
2. Thunder Bay Grille
3. The Captain's Table

Steaks/steakhouse

1. Johnny's Italian Steakhouse
2. Texas Roadhouse
3. Outback Steakhouse

Taco

1. Rudy's Tacos
2. Taco Bell
3. Azteca

Burger

1. Hunter's Club
2. Boozies Bar & Grill
3. Fuddruckers Restaurant

Best burger - Hunter's Club

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Voted as having the best burger in the Quad Cities, **Hunter's Club**, located at 2107 Fourth Avenue in Rock Island, offers several kinds of specialty burgers ranging in price from \$5.85 to \$6.95. When asked why its burgers are the best, owner Alan Mosley said, "It's the seasoning of the grill – grills get better as time goes on – combined with good quality 83-percent [lean] ground beef." And Hunter's grill has indeed been around a long time – since 1933!

Have the basic burger or get adventurous and try the Black & Blue Burger – made with Cajun seasoning and topped with blue cheese. Or bite into the Western Burger made with barbecue sauce and bacon. If you really want to try something different, have a Buffalo Burger, which is made with bison meat. "It's a common misconception that bison meat will taste gamey like venison," Mosley said. "It's much leaner [than beef]. It just tastes like a heartier version of ground beef." All Hunter's burgers are served with hand-cut fries and a choice of cottage cheese, coleslaw, or pasta salad. The restaurant can be reached at (309)786-9880.

– Johanna Welzenbach-Hilliard

Fries

1. McDonald's
2. Checkers
3. Hunter's Club

Most romantic restaurant

1. Johnny's Italian Steakhouse
2. The Faithful Pilot Café & Spirits (tie)
2. Steventon's (tie)

Buffet

1. Old Country Buffet
2. Golden Corral
3. Bishops Buffet (tie)
3. Ryan's Family Steak House (tie)

Coffee house

1. Theo's Java Club
2. Starbucks
3. Fireworks

Best coffee house - Theo's Java Club

Theo's Java Club (213 17th Street in Rock Island) has won this category for the past nine years; the people have spoken, and the people think Theo's is *good*. So instead of listing the venue's attributes, let's discuss the Word of the Day. Every morning, the Theo's staff writes a different, what-the-hell-does-*that*

-mean? word on a miniature chalkboard, and the first customer to correctly define it wins a free treat – which someone does every single day. (On a recent visit, the word was "effulgent,"

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meaning “transcendent.”) The idea began, says Theo’s owner Ted Grevas, “as a way to educate people about different

coffees

,” back when we were all just

learning

to spell “cappuccino.” “And it turned into this. The employees get really into it.” On that subject, Grevas adds that his business succeeds primarily “because of the people behind the counter.

They’re the heart and soul.” He ain’t kiddin’. While I was there, I heard the counter staff greet 10 customers in a row

by name

, and the warmth and good humor behind their greetings was genuine – how cool to see people actually

loving

their jobs. As I was leaving, I mentioned to a staffer that I worked at the

Reader

, and one of her co-workers, referring to our poll, effused, “Oh, I

so

voted for this place!” And when she said it, her smile was positively effulgent.

– **Mike Schulz**

Desserts

1. Village Inn Restaurant & Bakery
2. Whitey’s Ice Cream Stores
3. Iowa Machine Shed Restaurant

Best breakfast, Best desserts - Village Inn Restaurant & Bakery

When I was a student at Augustana College in the ’80s, my friends and I would often end a night of ... ahem ... *studying* with a trip to the **Village Inn**. Roughly half of us would indulge in coffee and skillet, the other half in coffee and pie. And sometimes, the following morning, we’d return and have coffee and whichever-choice-we-didn’t-have-the-night-before. Some traditions, it appears, never change. People are still crazy about the restaurant’s breakfast selections – pancakes, waffles, crepes, blintzes, French toast, omelettes, and, of course, those sensational skillet – with new options popping on the menu every two months. And if you haven’t sampled one of Village Inn’s 17 varieties of pie at one of its five Quad Cities locations, you’re not a true dessert fan; I can personally attest that many financially strapped college students are

happy

to spend their last nickels on a piece of French silk. But the true key to Village Inn’s continued popularity? “It’s a very friendly, neighborhood environment here,” says Rock Island Village Inn Manager Tim Masterson. “We try to take care of people like they’re guests in our own home.” If breakfast and dessert were

this

good – sorry, Mom – I never would have

left

home.

– Mike Schulz

Bar food

1. Blue Cat Brew Pub
2. Kelly's Irish Pub & Eatery
3. Pat McGuire's Irish American Grill (tie)
3. Rookies Sports Bar (tie)

Breakfast

1. Village Inn Restaurant & Bakery
2. Iowa Machine Shed Restaurant
3. Harlans

Locally brewed beer

1. Blue Cat Brew Pub
2. Bent River Brewing Company
3. Front Street Brewery

Sunday brunch

1. Thunder Bay Grille
2. Granite City Food & Brewery
3. The Lodge

Business lunch

1. Centro Restaurant
2. Johnny's Italian Steakhouse
3. Granite City Food & Brewery (tie)
3. Village Inn Restaurant & Bakery (tie)

Late-night eats

1. Ross' Restaurant
2. Village Inn Restaurant & Bakery
3. Taco Bell

Family dining

1. Iowa Machine Shed Restaurant
2. Village Inn Restaurant & Bakery
3. Riefes Restaurant

Atmosphere

1. Johnny's Italian Steakhouse
2. Centro Restaurant
3. Biaggi's Ristorante Italiano

Most hospitable restaurant

1. Iowa Machine Shed Restaurant

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- 2. Antonella's Pizzeria & Ristorante (tie)
- 2. Hickory Garden Family Restaurant (tie)