Best Restaurant - Cup A Jo

Michael Huggins knows about well-kept secrets. He said a magazine named the chicken salad at his coffee shop/restaurant at 1603 Fifth Avenue in Moline the best in the country. He just doesn't know the *name* of the magazine, and "I don't have the magazine to prove it," he said.

Possibly apocryphal accolades aside, Huggins - who co-owns Cup A Jo with his wife Kristie - said that it's the personal touch that distinguishes his business. He said loyal customers don't have to say a word to get their regular orders, and "we're not like corporate robots." (It should be noted that the owners topped the list of nominations for the best business owners in the Quad Cities, too, and their staff earned a second-place finish in the "Friendliest and Most Attentive Service" category.)

The restaurant, open from 7 a.m. and 2 p.m. Monday through Friday, has been in business since 2000, and offers coffee and specialty drinks, soups, salads, and sandwiches.

And what shouldn't people miss at Cup A Jo? "They should definitely try the chicken salad," Huggins said.

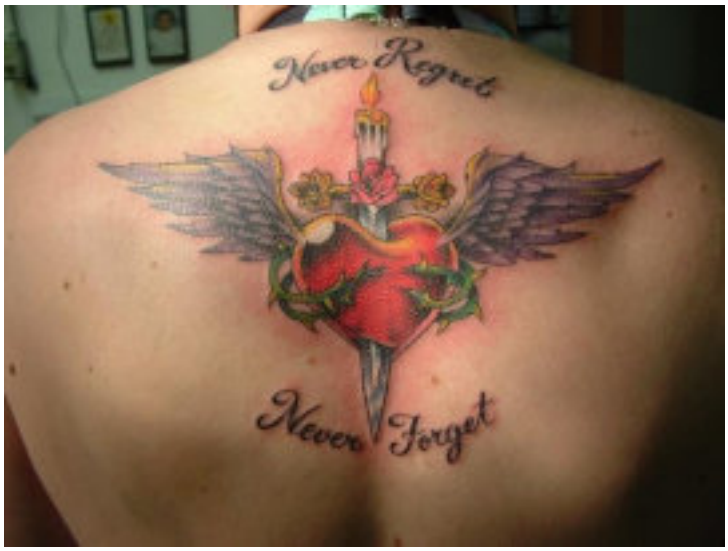
- **Jeff Ignatius**

Best Dance - Quad City Cloggers

Despite offering area classes and performances for more than 25 years, the Quad City Cloggers were named local dance's best-kept secret. And when discussing the benefits of clogging - the percussive dance style originating from Irish, English, and Scottish tradition - performer and instructor Mary Ann Robinson says, "Like tap dancing, you can pretty much pick it up at any time in your life and look good." With a selling point like that, it's hard to imagine why this group's existence is still a *secret*. Surely it's not one to the audiences at the Bix Family Fest, the Festival of Trees, or Pioneer Village, where the Quad City Cloggers continue to perform annually, or to spectators at the Quad City Senior Olympics, where they've been medaling for a decade. Yet Robinson, who started with the group in 1992 and has "loved it ever since," would still be happy for more people to be aware of the cloggers, their dance space at Bettendorf's Square & Round Hall (324 17th Street) - which Robinson says features "a *wonderful* wood floor ... you can just dance all night" - and the introductory lessons offered. "It's very comfortable and it's easy to learn," she says of clogging's "tap dancing with a country flair" style, and while youths are involved with the group (the youngest member is 15), Robinson adds that clog dancing is a terrific alternative for those who may feel their dancing days are behind them. "It's like Irish dancing," she says, "except we don't hop around so much, so it's not too hard on our knees."

- **Mike Schulz**

Best Tattoo Artist - Alex Pompa, O'Tool Design



O'Tool Design's Alex Pompa may have been voted tattoo artistry's best-kept secret, but as en eight-year veteran of the establishment who estimates tattooing some 20 customers per week ("Every day is full"), he's not exactly a secret to *everyone*. "I've been doing this for many years," he says, "so people have a lot of trust in me." As a high schooler, Pompa first practiced his trade on friends, even though, he says, "it made a lot of parents mad." Yet he adds that "after a while, I started tattooing their parents, too," and a visit to O'Tool Design (at 4010 18th Avenue in Rock Island) and a look through Pompa's intimidating portfolio help explain his popularity. There you'll find beautiful examples of the artist's portraits, cover-ups ("People have junky tattoos, and I'll turn them into *good* ones"), and spectacularly detailed angels and M.C. Escher works and alien machinery - "everything from a little ladybug to your mother's vacuum," he says. But in speaking with Pompa, what appears even more apparent than his talent is his pride in his work, and in his workplace; he's quick to praise his fellow O'Tool artists ("Everybody here does *fantastic* work"), and admits that "it feels good to get up in the morning and come here. It's nothing you get bored of, because every tattoo's different, and you get hyped up when you do something that you haven't done before. So it doesn't seem like work. It's coming to work and doing something you *enjoy.* "

- **Mike Schulz**