For the fifth consecutive year, the River Cities' Reader offers the results of our annual Best of the Quad Cities poll. The ballots were printed in December of last year, and the results reflect our readership's views on what was best in Y2K. After weeding out the invalid ballots (at least half of the ballot had to be completed), more than 200 ballots were counted, covering approximately 85 categories. Yet we *still* end up with a three-way tie for Best Restaurant! You'll see some newcomers among the Best this year, as well as plenty of old favorites and familiar faces. And we've done the hard work for you — we've tabulated votes and compiled a list of the three top finishers in each category. This year's cover image pits the meat-eaters against the veggie-eaters, showcasing two locally owned and operated dynasties in their own right: Julie Martens of Greatest Grains and Jim Overton of Jim's Rib Haven. Both businesses are Quad Cities originals, have been around for decades each, and have consistently won awards in their categories, year after year. So sit back and take in the Best things the Quad Cities have to offer. And be sure to vote in next year's poll, which will capture the best and brightest of everything 2001!

Best Restaurant

1. Biaggi's
1. Blue Cat Brew Pub
1. Dalton's

Best Restaurant (tie), Classiest Place to Take a Date, Best New Restaurant, Best Italian

Bloomington, Illinois, based Biaggi's opened its third restaurant, at Utica Ridge and 53rd Street in Bettendorf, in May and has been a big hit with both casual and formal diners in the Quad Cities ever since. Billed as "regional Italian, with accents on meats, fresh seafoods, and sandwiches," the restaurant can serve as many as 330 people at a time. Managing partner Scott Hopkins left Miami Beach, Florida, to take the gig here in the Quad Cities. Hopkins brought his experience at Magiano's and Michael Jordan's in Chicago to the table and turned down offers in Las Vegas, New York, and Los Angeles to join the Biaggi's team. "There are no secrets here," he said. "It's an emphasis on the basics – loyalty, honesty, be up-front and food-driven. I like it here, too. This town has a lot going for it – the cost of living, no traffic." Biaggi's serves pasta, pannini (its own brand of sandwiches), pizza, steak, pork, chicken, and seafood and has dessert favorites such as bread pudding and crème brulée. The restaurant serves both lunch and dinner draws diners for everything from business lunches to family sit-down dinners. Pictured is a sampling of the more than 120 Biaggi's employees.

Best Restaurant (tie), Best Place to Take Clients to Lunch

Treating your clients well is essential to good business relationships, and there's no better way to grease the wheels of commerce than a lunch at the Blue Cat Brew Pub in The District of Rock Island. Run by the brother-and-sister team of Dan and Martha Cleaveland, the Blue Cat celebrated its seventh anniversary in February. The restaurant features a comfortable atmosphere complete with original local and regional artworks, and the menu is diverse, covering everything from hearty pub fare to light vegetarian cuisine. Daily lunch and dinner specials round out the menu, and the Blue Cat is especially well-known for its one-of-a-kind, never-would-have-thought-of-that soup combinations. (Popular soup titles include Beer Bacon Cheese and Reuben.) And of course, the Blue Cat focuses on crafting brews to complement and accent any meal.

Classiest Place to Take a Date
1. Biaggi's
2. The Dock
3. Steventon's

Best New Restaurant
1. Biaggi's
2. Dalton's
3. Blackthorn Pub

Best Eats After the Bars Close
1. Village Inn
2. Ross'
3. Denny's

Best Place to Take Clients for Lunch
1. Blue Cat Brew Pub
2. Dalton's
3. RIBCO

Best Ribs
1. Jim's Rib Haven
2. RJ Boar's
3. Circle Tap

It speaks to the devotion the ribs inspire that Jim's Rib Haven received more votes than any other person, business, or thing in any category in our balloting, winning this race by an astonishing three-to-one margin. Jim's is a decades-old Quad Cities institution and a repeat winner in this category. The hickory-smoked meat is covered in a tangy barbecue sauce made from a secret family recipe. Even though Jim's ran away with this year's title, several other establishments had strong showings. Mirroring last year's balloting, R.J. Boar's came in second, and Circle Tap third.

Best Steaks
1. Outback
2. Lone Star
3. Dalton's

Best Pizza
1. Harris
2. Happy Joe's
3. Pizza Hut

Locally owned Harris Pizza has beaten all comers over the years, clobbering the competition in every pie competition. This year was no different, as Harris collected three times as many votes as its closest competitor; people instinctively seem to vote for this Quad Cities heavyweight. At

Harris' five locations, you can watch staff make your pizza, twirling the crust on a finger in the tradition of the great old pizzerias. It's a refreshing old-time touch.

Best Cup of Coffee/Capuccino/Espresso
1. Theo's Java Hut
2. Panera Bread
3. Borders

Best Cup of Coffee/Cappuccino/Espresso, Best Barista
When he started Theo's Java Hut in Davenport in 1993, Theo Grevas envisioned a business that served pastries and coffee. But it took only a few months to figure out it wouldn't fly, and Grevas expanded to a full deli. The concept worked well enough that he opened Theo's Java Club in 1994, and the Quad Cities have been very receptive: Theo's Java Hut was voted Best Cup of Coffee, and Grevas was named Best Barista (coffee bartender). The second honor made the owner laugh. "I'm not even behind the counter" except to help out, he protested. "I've just got my name on the door." Theo's menu includes more than a dozen varieties of hot and iced coffees, along with just about anything else you need to fill your belly.

Best Burger
1. Boozie's
2. Burger King
3. Dalton's
3. McDonald's

When the category is burgers in the Quad Cities, there's only one answer: Boozie's. Greg Poterack has owned the restaurant, which opened in 1979, for more than six years, but he's not quite sure of the origin of the famous Boozie Burger, which is topped with raw onions, lettuce, tomatoes, several kinds of cheese, and – of course – Boozie sauce. Year after year, Boozie's walks away with the Best Burger title, and 2000 was no different.

Best Tacos
1. Rudy's
2. Jalepeno's
3. Taco Bell

Best Subs
1. Subway
2. Hungry Hobo
3. Pickerman's
3. Arthur's Garden Deli

Best Selection of Beer on Tap
1. Old Chicago
2. Blue Cat Brew Pub
3. RIBCO

Best Selection of Wines
1. The Dock
2. Biaggi's
3. Dalton's

Best Martinis
1. Mac's Tavern
2. Blue Cat Brew Pub
3. RIBCO
3. Dalton's

Best Martinis, Best Neighborhood Bar
With a long history, its blue-cheese-stuffed olive, and more than two dozen varieties, it's little surprise that Mac's Tavern in downtown Davenport is a repeat winner in this category. A casual atmosphere and friendly service help distinguish Mac's from other watering holes, but the bar's variations on the classic martini make it a Quad Cities one-of-a-kind classic.

Best Margaritas
1. Chi-Chi's
2. Jalepeno's
3. Rudy's

Best Sunday Brunch
1. Jumer's Castle Lodge
2. The Dock
3. Pat McGuire's

Best Bakery
1. HyVee
2. Panera Bread
3. Old Town

Best Vegetarian Food
1. Greatest Grains
2. Faithful Pilot
3. Subway

Where else but Greatest Grains can one find tabouli, humus, and baked vegetarian ziti for lunch? Don't forget your daily dose of vegan Tibetan potato curry. Then there's the "happy tuna" salad made without tuna (that's why it's happy) and zucchini feta casserole. Greatest Grains is about as grassroots as it gets, with a homey deli counter that serves homemade vegetarian dishes (as well as a few with meat) and desserts for lunch and dinner, seven days a week. Co-owner Julie Martens (pictured on the cover) and her husband Clyde Mayfield started Greatest Grains more than 21 years ago and are currently at a third location at 1600 Harrison St. in Davenport. The restaurant/deli is only one section of Greatest Grains, which also includes a grocery for organic produce, bulk foods, spices, supplements, and organic foodstuffs.

Greatest Grains employs 25 people and is a favorite haunt of Palmer students, health nuts, and the rest of us who know great spinach mushroom quiche when we taste it.

Best Mexican Restaurant
1. Jalepeno's
2. Rudy's
3. Azteca
3. Carlos O'Kelly's

With a handful of restaurants and a line of chips and salsa, Jalapeño's has become a local business success story. And the food's good, too. Jalapeño's finds a comfortable balance between local flavor and chain-level consistency and professionalism. The menu is endearingly home-grown (a favorite: "Beef Meat"), but the quality, freshness, and presentation of the food are top-notch, and service is prompt and attentive.

Best Asian Food
1. Yen Ching
2. Mandarin
3. Erawan

Best Italian Food
1. Biaggi's
2. Olive Garden
3. Trattoria Tiramisu

Best Other Ethnic Food
1. India House
2. Olympic Flame
2. Pasteur

Best Waiter/Waitress
1. Michael Mato, Blue Cat Brew Pub
2. Teri Bostrom, Dalton's
3. Lisa Smith, RIBCO

A Philadelphia native who came to the Quad Cities seven years ago, Michael Mato has been working at the Blue Cat in the Rock Island District for six years. "The money's good," he said. It helps when customers regularly come in and ask for you by name. Mato was at a loss to explain his popularity at first. "They like me," he said. But then: "I think it's because I remember their names, their birthdays, their kids, and what they like to drink, and I bring it to them before they even ask." Yeah, that's probably it.

Best Nightclub
1. RIBCO
2. Lollie's
3. Thirsty Beaver

Best Nightclub, Best Place to Meet Someone Over 30, Best Place to Meet Someone Under 30

The only question remaining: Best place to meet a 30-year-old? We're pretty sure the answer would be RIBCO, the shorthand name for the always-popular Rock Island Brewing Company. Whatever you call it, RIBCO consistently has the best and most interesting lineup of live music in the Quad Cities, with everybody from Veruca Salt to Liquid Soul to Shemekia Copeland gracing its stage in the past year. In addition to its diverse musical leanings, RIBCO is also the most sought-after venue for local bands. And the club continues to work to improve its product, adding DJ Shane Brown after weekend shows and underground dance music once a week. RIBCO also remodeled recently, adding new booths, a better view of the stage, and a new kitchen. The club has also begun to offer an exclusive line of hand-crafted brews in addition to its great beer selection. All this helps bring in a great variety of people, from businessmen in suits to college students to Deadheads, making it a great place to find a new friend no matter your taste in people.

Best Casino

1. Isle of Capri
2. Jumer's Casino Rock Island
3. President

Best Neighborhood Bar

1. Mac's Tavern
2. Dalton's
3. RIBCO

Best Sports Bar

1. Halftime
2. Rookies
3. Sports Fans

Best Place to Meet Someone over 30

1. RIBCO
2. Mac's Tavern
3. Dalton's

Best Place to Meet Someone under 30

1. RIBCO
2. Thirsty Beaver
3. Dalton's

Best Venue or Club to See a Live Concert or Show

1. The Mark
2. RIBCO
3. Adler
3. Dalton's

Best Local Pop/Alternative Band
1. Einstein's Sister
2. Spatterdash
3. Lynn Allen
3. Jungle Dogs

Being Einstein would probably be easier than being Einstein's sister. As any long-suffering younger sibling will tell you, there's no greater curse than a relative's shadow, especially if that kin is accomplished. And so it is for Einstein's Sister, the unapologetic Quad Cities power-pop outfit led by Bill Douglas and Kerry Tucker. They're good enough for a major label, they get compared to all manner of rock greats (including Squeeze, XTC, and Elvis Costello), but they'll have a hard time making a name for themselves outside of being "that band that sounds like … ." They don't seem to care. On last year's wondrous Humble Creatures, the band crafted great guitar pop, and the quality of the album helped push the quintet to the top of our poll.

Best Local Metal Band
1. Circle 7
2. Bruised
2. Lynn Allen

Best Local Blues Band
1. Shane Johnson's Blue Train
2. Paul DePauw & Company
3. Ellis Kell

It was quite a year for Shane Johnson's Blue Train in 2000. In January, the foursome placed eighth out of 53 bands in an international competition in Memphis. They recorded a second album, Big Legged Women. And then, late in the year, two members split to allow the Blue Train to barrel around the country full-time. A new lineup is now in place, but we're here to celebrate the year and band that were: Johnson, bassist-vocalist John Resch, drummer Scott Willman, and harmonica-player Detroit Larry Davison. They worked together to give Big Legged Women a team feel, which is a rarity in a genre dominated by howlers hogging the mic and front-and-center guitarists.

Best Local Jazz Band
1. Manny Lopez
2. Elixir
3. New Complexion

Best Video Store
1. Family Video
2. Blockbuster
3. Hollywood

Best Art Space/Gallery
1. Davenport Museum of Art

2. Quad City Arts
3. Putnam Museum

Best Local Painter
1. Corrine Smith
2. Jerome Halligan
3. Ralph Iaccarino

Corrine Smith is a local working artist in Rock Island whose work excites and inspires with its vibrant color and shapes. Her subject matter continues to be a combination of organic and geometric form. “I still am interested in playing with the formal elements of color, shape, texture, lines, and values,” she said. “I never get tired of it. I absolutely have to do it. My subject is endless. It is constantly evolving, but it is never exhaustive.” Corrine works diligently at her craft. Every day there are associated tasks to be accomplished, whether sketching and drawing the next work, painting on a current piece, shipping paintings to the galleries that sell her work, or taking slides to enter in future shows, to name a few. She has eight shows this year alone.

Best Local Sculptor
1. Isabel Bloom
2. Eric Lyons
3. Skip Willits
3. Corrine Smith

Best Local Artist (Other Media)
1. JoDean Rousey
2. Corrine Smith
3. Pat Collins

Best Annual Music Festival
1. Bluesfest
2. Bix
3. Ya Maka My Weekend

Best Annual Arts Festival
1. Beaux Arts
2. Riverssance
3. ArtStroll

Best Place to See Live Theatre
1. Circa 21
2. Adler
3. Playcrafters Barn Theatre

Best Play
1. Christmas Wish
2. Peter Pan

Best Concert
1. Dixie Chicks
2. KISS
3. BB King

KISS and B.B. King proved no matches for the country conquerors Dixie Chicks in this category. The group's October 6 concert at The Mark of the Quad Cities featured all the hits but a few surprises as well: a tongue-in-cheek slide show, snow falling from the rafters, and the three members scattered in the audience for "Goodbye Earl." Fans were not disappointed.

Best Women's Clothing Store
1. Von Maur
2. Express
3. Talbots

Best Men's Clothing Store
1. Von Maur
2. Gentry Shop
3. Structure

Best Kid's Clothing Store
1. Gap
2. Gymboree
3. Old Navy

Best Used/Thrift/Vintage Store
1. Goodwill
2. DAV
3. Salvation Army

Best Shoe Store
1. Payless Shoe Source
2. Von Maur
3. Warehouse Shoes

Best Bookstore
1. Borders
2. Waldenbooks
3. Mellow Blue Planet

Best Record/CD Store
1. Co-op
2. Borders
3. Best Buy

Best Bike Shop

1. Bike N Hike
2. BMX Racing Zone
2. Jerry & Sparky's

Best Sporting-Goods Store
1. Temples
2. Killir
2. Kunkels

Best Jewelry Store
1. Kay's
2. Necker's
3. Helzberg

Best Hardware Store
1. K&K
2. Lowe's
3. Menard's

Best Liquor/Beer/Wine Store
1. Gendler's
2. Liquor Shoppe
3. Cork & Brie
3. Martel
3. Osco

Best Grocery Store
1. HyVee
2. Eagle
3. Jewel
3. Fareway

Best Car Dealer
1. Lujack's Northpark Auto Plaza
2. Green Chevrolet/Chrysler/Daewoo
3. Reynolds Motor Company

Best Florist
1. K'nees
2. HyVee
3. Coleman

Best Office-Supply Store
1. Office Max
2. Staples
3. Office Depot

Customer service is Office Max's priority; they treat each customer like their only customer. They have the best selection at better-than-average prices, and their atmosphere is extremely friendly. Office Max is currently offering the newest in electronics and technology and a large selection of printing paper suitable for a variety of uses, and the store soon have a brand new selection of lamps for both office and home use. Office Max offers more than 30,000 items on-line, and their own brand items should be considered because they are often better priced. Customers can expect free next-day delivery. This photo includes managers Tom Langford and Mike Smith and team members Gina, Krista, Carol, Brenda, Laurie, Gwar, and Matt.

Best Dry Cleaner
1. Burke's
2. Quality
3. Sanitary

Best Furniture Store
1. American
2. Good's
2. Sofa Mart

Best Auto-Repair Shop
1. Lujack's
2. Van's Fabrication
3. Ace Muffler

Best Internet Service Provider
1. America OnLine
2. Internet Revealed
3. QC Online

Best Computer Store
1. Gateway
2. Best Buy
3. Office Max

Best Antique Store
1. Riverbend
2. Antique America
3. More Than Memories

With more than 200,000 items, seven buildings, and nearly three decades of history, Riverbend Antiques qualifies as a no-brainer in the category. With everything from country kitchens to art deco to Third World items, you'll find something in virtually any style at Riverbend. Owner Ron Bellomy said he grew up around antiques but still learns new things in his business, even though he's been doing it since 1972. Among the more interesting items he's ever bought: a hand-carved ventriloquist doll with real hair, made in New Orleans circa 1840. "One of a kind," he said.

Best Art-Supply Store
1. Dick Blick
2. Office Max
3. Evergreen

Whether you're shopping for a child's first paints or a working professional, Dick Blick Art Materials (4601 16th St. in Moline) will be able to meet your art and budget needs. The store's staff is familiar with a wide range of materials, and each specializes in a particular area. "We can really help people who have a lot of questions," said one employee. Dick Blick also provides "boxed sets" of everything someone might need to get started with a particular type of art, and on the other end offers "open stock" purchasing, meaning that if you run out of one color of paint, you don't have to purchase an entire set to get some more. The store is also distinguished by its excellent custom-framing service.

Best Hair Salon
1. Storm
2. Blades
3. Regis

Best Hair Salon, Best Hair Stylist, Best Small Business Owner
Denise Day and Heath Morgan sure know how to run a business. Not only did their business Storm Design Team wallop the competition in the Best Hair Salon category, Morgan and Gina Deere took the top two spots in Best Hair Stylist voting. And Day and Morgan also won the Best Small Business balloting. Is that enough? No. The full-service day spa is preparing to launch a Web site (http://www.stormdesignteam.com) that promises some exciting features, including a virtual tour of Storm's services, on-line purchasing of gift certificates and products, staff bios and photos, and maybe even online booking. (Storm is planning to have the site up by June.) The salon's stylists have distinguished themselves with lots of education and training, but there's also a certain attitude. "What makes us better?" one employee said. "We're Storm!"

Best Hair Stylist
1. Heath Morgan @ Storm
2. Gina Deere @ Storm
3. Lisa Harker @ Blades

Best Barista
1. Theo @ Theo's
2. Melissa @ Theo's
3. Megan @ Novel

Best Bartender
1. Matt Hastings @ Dalton's
2. Karen @ Chateau
3. John Horvath @ RIBCO

Best Small Business Owner

1. Denise Day & Heath Morgan @ Storm
2. Bret Dalton @ Dalton's
3. Paul DePauw @ BMX Racing Zone

Best Radio Station
1. 93.5
2. 106.5
3. 98.9

Best Radio Personality
1. Dwyer & Michaels
2. Dave Lavora
3. Bob & Tom

Best TV News Station
1. KWQC 6
2. WQAD 8
3. Fox 18

Best TV News Reporter
1. Sharon Derycke
2. Paula Sands
3. Mike Mickel

Best TV Weathercast
1. Terry Swails
2. Neil Kastor
3. Erik Maitland

Best Golf Course
1. Saukie
2. TPC at Deere Run
3. Glynn's Creek

Downtown With Most Potential
1. Davenport
2. Rock Island
3. Moline

Best Public Park
1. Vander Veer
2. Scott County
3. Longview

Best Public Library
1. Bettendorf

2. Davenport
3. Rock Island