



WOW

09.15.11 | battlecreekenquirer.com/wow

BEST OF THE SOUTHWEST

You voted, we counted — now look inside for the winners of the best restaurants in Southwest Michigan.

SUBMIT YOUR LISTINGS

MAIL, FAX OR E-MAIL us the details with the event name, address, prices, times and phone number where readers can get more information. Mail it to WOW, Battle Creek Enquirer, 77 E. Michigan Ave., Battle Creek, MI 49017. Fax it to 964-0299.

ADD YOUR EVENT to our calendar directly; it's quick and easy at battlecreekenquirer.com/events.

PHOTOS should be high quality prints - no computer printouts or scanned images. We prefer high resolution JPEG images via e-mail.

DEADLINE

The deadline for submitting listings is **5 p.m. Friday** before publication date.

QUESTIONS?

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BEST OF THE SOUTHWEST. Page 6

Clara's on the River swept up wins in four categories this year. We talked with the restaurants and the fans who love them.

GET YOUR ART ON. Page 10

Festival of the Forks is more than a reunion in Albion — it's a chance to experience art, music and food.

MUSIC: Gunship Radio brands their music as "Michigan desert rock." **Page 12**

MARVELOUS: The Wonderettes are crooning the pop music hits of the fifties. **Page 13**

GAME GUIDE: "Rise of Nightmares" with Kinect is like walking through a horror movie. **Page 15**

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Find more entertainment news & events at battlecreekenquirer.com/wow

COVER: Fancy cupcakes at the Continental Bakery and Deli. JOHN GRANT/THE ENQUIRER



Local restaurants and their fans

Andy Fitzpatrick
The Enquirer

The eaters of the area have spoken, and they continue to speak as they frequent their favorite restaurants.

The winners of the Enquirer's 2011 Best of the Southwest competition are led by Clara's on the River, which has won Best Overall this year. Readers could vote online or send in ballots naming their favorite restaurants in a number of categories.

Clara's also took Best Ambiance, Best Hospitality and Best Cocktails. Owner Ross Simpson is happy about the wins, but none of this is a surprise to the people who matter most in the competition: Clara's customers.

A group of employees from Battle Creek's Summit Pointe sat in a booth at Clara's Friday enjoying their pre-salad soups. One of them, Bob Lambert of Paw Paw, said the restaurant winning in multiple categories made sense

to him, especially in the hospitality department.

"They know your likes and dislikes," he said. "They know your wants and desires. Really, they do everything they can to try to make your dining experience pleasant."

Another member of the Summit Pointe lunch group, Jeannie Goodrich of Union City, said staff will often check up on them to make sure they're having a good time.

"Ross still comes up and bothers me every time I'm eating," she joked. "It makes you feel very welcome."

One of the people responsible for that hospitality is Clara's hostess Hannah Stout of Battle Creek. The 20-year-old has been working at the riverside restaurant for about two years and initially thought it would be an interesting place to work. She said the

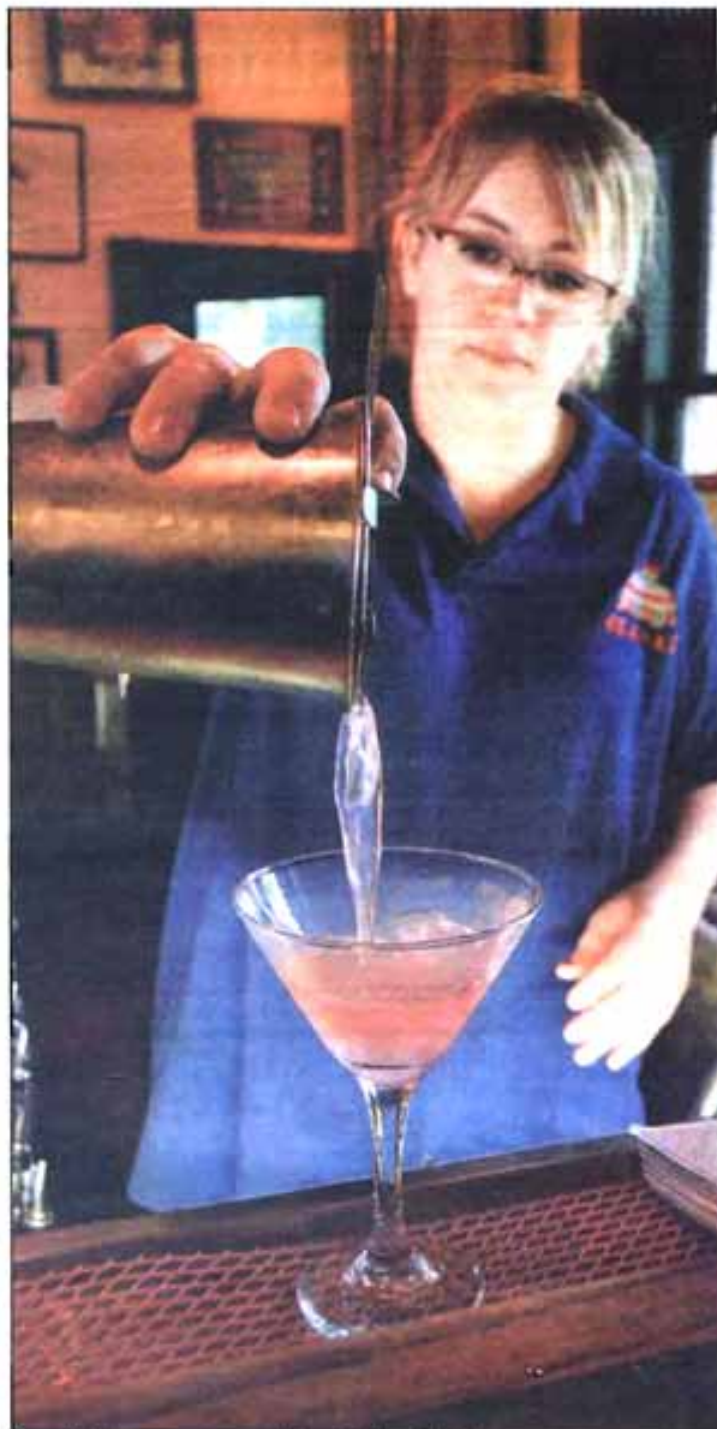
key to being a good hostess is remembering what people like when they walk in, such as where they like to sit and what they like to drink.



The exterior of Clara's on the River.



Sit and enjoy a few cocktails at Clara's.



Amanda Leinaar pours a cosmopolitan at Clara's on the River. JOHN GRANITZ/ENQUIRER



Pastry chef Maria Carey carries a tray of cupcakes at the Continental Bakery and Deli. JOHN GRAYTHE ENQUIRER

**TOP TEN
BEST OVERALL**

- Clara's on the River, 44 N. McCamy St., Battle Creek.
- Schuler's Restaurant and Pub, 115 S. Eagle St., Marshall.
- Malia Mediterranean Bistro, 34 W. Michigan Ave., Battle Creek.
- Arcadia Brewing Company, 103 W. Michigan Ave., Battle Creek.
- Addington Hills Cafe, 295 E. Emmett St., Battle Creek.
- Captain Luey's Calabash Seafood, 181 E. Columbia Ave., Battle Creek.
- Zarzuela Spanish-Mediterranean, 301 E. Michigan Ave., Marshall.
- Seasonal Grille, 150 W. State St., Hastings.
- Bill's Pizza Factory, 256 N. Helmer Road, Battle Creek.
- Dark Horse Brewing Co., 511 S. Kalamazoo Ave., Marshall.

"I feel pretty good about that," she said of Enquirer readers voting for Clara's. "It makes me feel good as a person to know that we have that and I help out with that."

According to Simpson, the hospitality continues past the hostess station at the front door and to the bar, where he described bartenders as performers on a stage responding to the customers' need to talk to someone after a long day. They need to be clever as well, he said, which can lead to clever drink recipes.

One of them is Clara's own take on the Long Island iced tea, the Boston Tea Party.

"It's our Long Island iced tea, then you add gin and Grand Marnier," he said. "We start watching you after one of those."

Another popular Battle Creek food destination with a loyal fan base is Continental Pastries and Deli, winner of the Best of the Southwest's Best Sweets/Desserts category. Stepping inside hits customers with an aroma that leads them to cases full of colorful displays of cakes, cookies, donuts, breads and more.

Owner Janna Nunn's shop boasts a huge selection of pastries and baked goods on one half of the building, complemented by a deli and ice cream shop on the other. The latter part is what usually brings in EPI employee Rich Fitch on his lunch breaks, although he's ordered their cakes and other desserts on special occasions or for work events.

"I've taken cakes home and that kind of thing because it is good, consistent quality you can always count on," he said. "Custard-filled cakes are superb."

Pastry chef Maria Carey said that quality comes from totally scratch-made ingredients. She said the cakes, custard, butter creams and more are all made right there.

"Pretty much nowhere else in the area does that anymore," she said. "I think people are kind of drawn to the fact that we're still making things from scratch."

The chef said French pastries and cheesecakes -- her own favorite -- are typically the fastest out the door. The shop is slowly moving into what she called the Food Network era, which means following trends such as offering gourmet cupcakes.

That's what newly-married couple Cory and Ken Craft selected for their wedding cake, which they were paying for at a recent trip to Continental. Their cake consisted of a more traditional top piece with tiers of cupcakes below.

It was Ken's first time in the bakery Sept. 8. When asked what he thought about the place, he looked around for a second and his bride answered before he could.

"He's hungry," she said.

Jill Roecker of Battle Creek was also concerned about her husband's stomach; she doesn't usually get desserts at Continental, she said, but he does. That day, it was a couple of glazed donuts being brought home to him.

"I get all my stuff here because it's fresh every day," she said, adding that she loves the breads and hamburger buns at Continental. "My neighbor, who's a retired teacher, comes up every day and gets the ladyfingers."

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Assortment of cookies can be found at the deli.



Happy face cookies are all smiles until they are eaten.



A chocolate cake at the Continental Bakery and Deli.