

SPECIAL ISSUES :

*Charleston City Paper* **BEST OF**  
**CHARLESTON**

READERS' PICKS

Best Restaurant  
Peninsula Grill  
112 N. Market St. Downtown 723-0700

Best New Restaurant  
Zinc Bistro and Bar  
28A Bridgeside Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 216-9330

Best Restaurant When Someone Else is Paying  
Peninsula Grill  
112 N. Market St. Downtown 723-0700

Best Chef  
Robert Carter, Peninsula Grill  
112 N. Market St. Downtown 723-0700

Best Wait Staff  
Peninsula Grill  
112 N. Market St. Downtown 723-0700

Best Sommelier  
Craig Donofrio, Coast and 39 Rue de Jean  
39 John St. Downtown 722-8838 and 722-8881

Best Caterer  
Cru Catering  
289 East Bay St. Downtown 534-2433

Best Downtown Restaurant  
Peninsula Grill  
112 N. Market St. Downtown 723-0700

Best James Island Restaurant  
Mustard Seed  
1978 Maybank Hwy. James Island 762-0072

Best Folly Beach Restaurant  
Folly Hideaway (now closed)  
Previously located at 66 W. 9th St. Folly Beach

Best Mt. Pleasant Restaurant  
J. Bistro  
819 Coleman Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 971-7778

Best Sullivan's Island Restaurant  
Poe's Tavern  
2210 Middle St. Sullivan's Island 883-0083

Best IOP Restaurant  
The Boathouse at Breach Inlet  
101 Palm Blvd. Isle of Palms 886-8000

Best West Ashley Restaurant  
Al di La  
25 Magnolia Road West Ashley 571-2321

Best N. Charleston Restaurant  
Park Circle Grill  
4726 Spruill Ave. N. Charleston 554-6003

Best Summerville Restaurant  
The Dining Room at Woodlands Resort and Inn  
125 Parsons Road Summerville 875-2600

Best Romantic Restaurant  
Fulton Five  
5 Fulton St. Downtown 853-5555

Best Waterfront Dining  
Vickery's Shem Creek  
1313 Shrimp Boat Lane Mt. Pleasant 884-4440

Best Outdoor Patio  
Vickery's Downtown  
15 Beaufain St. Downtown 577-5300

Best Restaurant for Children  
Chuck E. Cheese's  
1610 Sam Rittenberg Blvd. West Ashley 763-0663  
7258 Rivers Ave. N. Charleston 824-9761

Best Japanese Restaurant  
Miyabi  
688 Citadel Haven Dr. West Ashley 571-6025

Best Chinese Restaurant  
Red Orchids  
1401 Sam Rittenberg Blvd. West Ashley 573-8787

Best Thai/Vietnamese Restaurant  
Basil  
460 King St. Downtown 724-3490

Best French Restaurant  
39 Rue de Jean  
39 John St. Downtown 722-8881

Best Italian Restaurant  
Al di La  
25 Magnolia Road West Ashley 571-2321

Best Mexican Restaurant  
La Hacienda  
354 King St. Downtown 723-3333  
and other locations

Best Greek Restaurant  
Athens Restaurant

325 Folly Road James Island 795-0957

**Best Cheap Meal**

Moe's Southwest Grill  
381 King St. Downtown Charleston 577-7727  
900 Houston Northcutt Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 388-2200  
and other locations

**Best Restaurant for Vegetarians**

Mustard Seed  
1220 Ben Sawyer Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 849-0050  
1978 Maybank Hwy. James Island 762-0072

**Best Sunday Brunch**

The Terrace  
145 Calhoun St. Downtown 937-0314

**Best Breakfast**

Bookstore Café  
412 King St. Downtown 720-8843

**Best Late Night Menu**

Waffle House  
2229 Savannah Hwy. West Ashley 571-4540  
and other locations

**Best Meat and 3 Veggies**

Jestine's Kitchen  
251 Meeting St. Downtown 722-7224

**Best Burger**

Your Place  
40 Market St. Downtown 722-8360

**Best French Fries**

McDonald's  
230 Spring St. Downtown 724-3476  
and other locations

**Best Fried Chicken**

Jestine's Kitchen  
251 Meeting St. Downtown 722-7224

**Best Sweet Tea**

Jestine's Kitchen  
251 Meeting St. Downtown 722-7224

**Best New York Style Pizza**

Andolini's  
82 Wentworth St. Downtown 722-7437  
1117 Savannah Hwy. West Ashley 225-5200  
414 Coleman Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 849-7437

**Best Gourmet Pizza**

Mellow Mushroom  
309 King St. Downtown 723-7374

**Best Sub Sandwich/Hoagie**

Jersey Mike's  
64 Sycamore Ave. West Ashley 766-2999  
and other locations

Best Wings  
Wild Wing Cafe  
644 Coleman Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 971-9464  
36 N. Market St. Downtown 722-9464  
7618 Rivers Ave. N. Charleston 818-9464

Best Seafood  
Hank's Seafood Restaurant  
10 Hayne St. Downtown 723-3474

Best Place to Buy Local Seafood  
Crosby's Seafood  
2223 Folly Rd. James Island 795-4049  
382 Spring St. Downtown 937-0029  
2019 Cherry Hill Lane N. Charleston 577-3063

Best Oysters  
Bowens Island  
1870 Bowens Island Road James Island 795-2757

Best Sushi  
Wasabi  
61 State St. Downtown 577-5222

Best Salad  
California Dreaming  
1 Ashley Pointe Dr. West Ashley 766-1644

Best Steak  
Outback Steakhouse  
1890 Sam Rittenberg Blvd. West Ashley 763-8999  
7643 Rivers Ave. N. Charleston 569-3600  
715 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 849-9456

Best Shrimp and Grits  
Hank's Seafood Restaurant  
10 Hayne St. Downtown 723-3474

Best Ice Cream  
Marble Slab Creamery  
1903 N. Hwy 17 Mt. Pleasant Towne Centre 388-0052  
520 Folly Road James Island 762-9099 and other locations

Best Barbecue  
Melvin's  
925 Houston Northcutt Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 881-0549  
538 Folly Road James Island 762-0511

Best Hot Dog  
Jack's Cosmic Dogs  
2805 N. Hwy. 17 Mt. Pleasant 884-7677

Best She-Crab Soup  
82 Queen  
82 Queen St. Downtown 723-7591

Best Bagels  
Bagel Nation  
5137 N. Rhett Ave. N. Charleston 529-3032  
1909 N. Hwy. 17 Mt. Pleasant 881-1462

520 Folly Road James Island 406-7869

**Best Deli**

East Bay Deli

334 East Bay St. Downtown 723-1234

159 Market St. Downtown 723-4443

**Best Bakery**

Saffron

333 E. Bay St. Downtown 722-5588

**Best Desserts**

Kaminsky's Most Excellent Cafe

78 N. Market St. Downtown 853-8270

1028 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 971-7437

**Best Coffee House**

Starbucks

168 Calhoun St. Downtown 805-8005

and other locations

**Best Wine Selection?(Retail)**

Total Wine

1820 Ashley River Road West Ashley 763-7034

**Best Wine Selection (Bar or Restaurant)**

McCrary's

2 Unity Alley Downtown 577-0025

**Best Beer Selection (Retail)**

Total Wine

1820 Ashley River Road West Ashley 763-7034

**Best Bottle Beer Selection (Bar or Restaurant)**

Mellow Mushroom

309 King St. Downtown 723-7374

**Best Beer on Tap**

Charleston Beerworks

468 King St. Downtown 577-5885

**Best Happy Hour**

Vickery's

15 Beaufain St. Downtown 577-5300

1313 Shrimp Boat Lane Mt. Pleasant 884-4440

**Best New Bar**

Voodoo

15 Magnolia Road West Ashley 769-0228

**Best Neighborhood Bar**

Moe's Crosstown Tavern

714 Rutledge Ave. Downtown 722-3287

**Best Upscale Bar**

Zinc Bistro and Bar

28A Bridgeside Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 216-9330

**Best Rooftop Bar**

The Rooftop Bar at Vendue

19 Vendue Range Downtown 577-7970

Best Bar Staff  
Village Tavern  
1055 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 884-6311

Best Downtown Bar  
A.C.'s Bar and Grill  
467 King St. Downtown 577-6742  
1035 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 849-2267

Best Mt. Pleasant Bar  
Village Tavern  
1055 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 884-6311

Best James Island Bar  
Kickin' Chicken  
1175 Folly Road James Island 225-6996

Best Folly Beach Bar  
Sand Dollar  
7 Center St. Folly Beach 588-9498

Best IOP Bar  
The Windjammer  
1008 Ocean Blvd. Isle of Palms 886-8596

Best Sullivan's?Island Bar  
Poe's Tavern  
2210 Middle St. Sullivan's Island 883-0083

Best West Ashley Bar  
Gene's Haufbrau  
817 Savannah Hwy. West Ashley 225-4363

Best N. Charleston Bar  
Madra Rua  
1034 E. Montague Ave. N. Charleston 554-2522

Best Summerville Bar  
Icehouse  
104 E. Doty Ave. Summerville 875-5500

Best Waterfront Bar  
Red's Icehouse  
98 Church St. Mt. Pleasant 388-0003

Best College Bar  
Charleston Beerworks  
468 King St. Downtown 577-5885

Best Cigar Bar  
Club Habana  
177 Meeting St. Downtown 853-5900

Best Biker Bar  
Sand Dollar  
7 Center St. Folly Beach 588-9498

Best Authentic Pub  
The Griffon  
18 Vendue Range Downtown 723-1700

Best No-Frills Watering Hole  
Big John's Tavern  
251 East Bay St. Downtown 723-3483

Best Dance Club  
Trio Club  
139 Calhoun St. Downtown 965-5333

Best Pool Hall  
Player's Place  
627 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 881-8883  
1401 Sam Rittenberg Blvd. West Ashley 556-4991

Best Pick-up Joint  
Henry's  
54 N. Market St. Downtown 723-4363

Best Late Night Bar  
Charlie's Little Bar  
141 East Bay St. Downtown 723-6242

Best Sports Bar  
King Street Grille  
304 King St. Downtown 723-5464

Best Gay/Lesbian Club  
Club Pantheon  
28 Ann St. Downtown 577-2582

Best Adult Establishment  
Thee Southern Belle  
2028-B Pittsburgh Ave. Downtown 722-6833

Best Martini  
Club Habana  
177 Meeting St. Downtown 853-5900

Best Margarita  
La Hacienda  
354 King St. Downtown 723-3333  
and other locations

Best Cold Beer  
Charleston Beerworks  
468 King St. Downtown 577-5885

Best Cheap Beer Deal  
Yo Burrito  
675 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 856-0061

#### CRITICS' PICKS

Best Oft-Overlooked Restaurant  
FIG  
232 Meeting St. Downtown 805-5900

We owe Mike Lata an apology. FIG is a great restaurant with a good bar and ideal atmosphere for thirty-somethings who want a fun place to dine and drink without being offered draft PBR and smelling like smoke at the end of the night.

The food's great, and the location's easy to find. But for some reason, we sometimes forget he's sitting there at the corner of Wentworth and Meeting, just waiting to prove the name — that his Food Is Good. We're sure someone is eating there, and we promise to remember to visit soon. —Lee Jenkins

Best Restaurant You Never patronized  
Crescent

Oh, we do miss her so. Crescent was a tiny little strip mall restaurant in Mt. Pleasant that served up sterling-quality food in an inventively decorated dining room located between Wild Wing and LifeQuest on Coleman Boulevard. Crescent didn't get to work its magic for long, so you may have missed them if you didn't get there before last spring. That is a shame. Scott Ostrander could really cook the hell out of a dinner, and now he's doing it for someone else. — Lee Jenkins

BEST SCREWITO  
Yo Burrito Losing Its Lease  
86 Wentworth St. Downtown 853-3287

Sure, the College of Charleston has every legal right to kick Yo Burrito out of its Wentworth and St. Philip corner spot to make way for a department building. But it could have done a better job of telling owner Nick Powers (sounds like an alias for a superhero) the timetable. Jerking him around for the better part of a year, Powers had scant idea at times when his restaurant would be closed, thanks to the College's apparent feet-dragging. This made it really hard for Powers to deal with his questioning staff and diners. Additionally, because the College is closing the working business through eminent domain — a first-ever, we believe, for the institution — it owes Powers some sort of financial compensation. But, last we heard, the offer on the table was way short of what Powers has submitted. Looks like there's gonna be a court fight. —Bill Davis

Best Upscale Dinner on the Cheap  
Amuse  
1720 Sam Rittenberg Blvd. West Ashley 573-8778

One of the hardest things about being a foodie in Charleston is the expense. Not all of us have the bucks to tool around in fancy downtown joints, dining on \$200 meals. But at a mere \$5 bucks a plate, Amuse on lowly Sam Ritt offers an affordable yet fabulous menu that entertains the most committed culinary geeks among our staff with a great assortment of Italian and Spanish classics, like Risotto Sangiovese and mussels with sofrito. Equally affordable wine pairings take this one right over the top. —Lee Jenkins

Best Place to Take a Kid  
The Boathouse on East Bay  
14 Chapel St. Downtown 577-7171

The Boathouse combines upscale food and a relaxed setting, making it a perfect place to treat a kid who's done something worth rewarding. The kids' menu has the basic chicken fingers and noodles, but it also boasts a petite filet mignon and mini-lobster tails, ranging in price from \$4.95 to \$12.95. Each entree comes with mashed potatoes, or you can substitute vegetable of the day, rice, or another side. The Boathouse: kid-tested and mother-approved. —Stephanie Barna

Best Dining Experience  
Grill 225  
Market Pavilion Hotel 225 East Bay St. Downtown 266-4222

If you're eating at Grill 225 and you see the men in white coats coming, don't worry. They just want to take your empty plates away. 225 prides itself on

creating a dining experience where visitors can look forward to more than a fine meal. Managers are always present and there's a server for each table, along with an assistant who will blanket diners with service. The secret to the restaurant's growing reputation as a place where you'll be pampered is simple — the staff has good memories. If a couple gets engaged there and returns the next year, they'll often be seated at the same table and every attempt will be made to reconstruct their original experience. Training is rigorous and constant — meetings are held every day and the Grill's always trying to reinvent itself and evolve. The generous portions, wraparound banquet style seating and décor help to make a meal at 225 an experience worth remembering. — Nick Smith

#### Best Kettle Corn

Tom Miller, the Kettle Korn Guy

Granted, he's one of the very few people in Charleston in the kettle corn business, but Tom Miller pops a mean kettle of popcorn, and that's a fact. You may have seen him at the Farmer's Market on Saturday mornings or last spring at our Movies in Marion Square. But you don't have to see him to know when Tom's stirring up a batch of his unique molasses-sweetened goodness. With just the right touch of sea salt in that big brass kettle of his, the smell alone is like a shot of nitrous to your salivary glands, and when the kernels hit that certain special temperature, you just better stand back, son, 'cause that shit sounds like a goddamn Apollo rocket taking off! —Patrick Sharbaugh

#### Best Downsizing Restaurateur

Brett McKee, Oak Steakhouse  
17 Broad St. Downtown 722-4220

Brett might have gone from three restaurants to one, and he might taken a nice break from the public eye, but Oak Steakhouse is more like three restaurants in one. Brett, who had allowed his signature pâté to fill in for a while, is back in cook's whites and is as bald as ever. With his funky glasses and tattoo peeking over the neck of his chef's coat, he's running the kitchen and kissing the ladies throughout Oak's snazzy little bar, elegant mezzanine, and cozy third floor. He's got the key to the private wine lockers and knows every inch of the reasoning behind Oak's décor. In fact, we're not sure this was downsizing at all — maybe we should just call it consolidation. —Lee Jenkins

#### Best Save

Jacques Larson at Cintra Restaurant  
16 N. Market St. Downtown 377-1090

The very day we talked to Chef Larson for his profile in our dining guide, dish, his restaurant changed hands. It's now open as Cintra, and we have faith in Larson's ability to land on his feet. There's no question that his talent, grace, class, and just damn good cooking will lead him to make as much of this opportunity as he did when Brett McKee launched him at Union Hall. —Lee Jenkins

#### Best Restaurant Emperor

Sal Parco  
Boulevard Diner, Mustard Seed, Sette

Sal Parco may also get "nicest" restaurateur — with friendly Mustard Seeds happily growing all over the place and Boulevard Diner packing them in, Parco opened Sette with a lovely "number seven" Italian theme and a great menu that features excellent pasta and risotto at the value-friendly prices Parco made famous at the first Mustard Seed years ago. —Lee Jenkins

#### Best Little Bird that Left the Nest

Casey Glowacki

Casey Glowacki had run Five Loaves Café like a cute little top on Cannon Street for years under the Sal Parco flag. Now, he's on his own and has expanded to Millennium Music, and we hear there will even be a Five Loaves coming to Mt. P in the old East Side Deli & Bakery site in the Crickentree shopping strip. He really deserves his success; the café is always ideal and the food is great, with an endless variety of soups, nifty little sandwiches, and super-fresh salads. —Lee Jenkins

Best Place to Stay on Your Diet, Whatever Diet that is  
Square On l'On  
18-B Resolute Lane Mt. Pleasant 856-4246

Serving everything from South Beach Diet items and low calorie/carb options to an egg-and-Italian sausage-and-cheese breakfast casserole that serves 10, this place helps you keep an eye on your thighs and your kids. And if you're a Stepford wife living in a \$350K house that your husband paid three quarters of a million dollars for, what could be sweeter? Oh, yeah, killing that nosy neighbor, Martha Huber, who we think was blackmailing you over the affair you had. — Tracey Palmer

Best Lunch Counter Redo  
Brent's on Broad  
19 Broad St. Downtown 853-8081

Brent's on Broad used to be a homely little joint, but we were walking down Broad Street the other day and were struck by the sights and smells emanating from inside Brent's. It's gorgeous now, with warm paneling and good lighting everywhere. There seems to be a good crowd, and the smell of the place is amazing. We can't wait to actually eat there — again and again and again. —Lee Jenkins

Best Revamp-o  
El Mercadito & Taquiera  
3575 Maybank Hwy Johns Island 824-9898

El Mercadito wins the title less because of its current appearance and more because of how pathetic it was before someone got hold of a little cash and a Mexican restaurant catalog. Still, the changes are impressive, and the new Hispanic-themed tapestry booths, good lighting, and new bar finally live up to the delicious and authentic tacos and margaritas they've offered from the beginning. —Lee Jenkins

Best Gas Lights  
Carolina's  
10 Exchange St. Downtown 724-3800

The remodeling of Carolina's over the past year featured the prettiest little light fixtures we've ever seen. The warmth and authenticity of real gas flames warm up the room and highlight the gorgeous Charleston-centered black-and-white photography, while giving the whole place the perfect mix of old-fashioned grace and contemporary sophistication we love so much in our downtown upscale dining establishments. —Lee Jenkins

Best Inexplicable New Trend  
Tapas Bars

"What the hell?" we asked when Voodoo, Chai's Lounge and Tapas Bar, 11 Center Street, Hatchell's American Tapas Tavern, and Amuse all popped up this year, seemingly at once. Well, after a fair amount of thought and munching on those tiny little plates, we figured it out: this is how we wanted to be eating

anyway, and it's hanging on in other cities. And maybe, just maybe, Meritège didn't make it just on the drinking crowd. So, just chalk it up to us being behind the curve once again — this time, though, it's come full circle and full flavor. — Lee Jenkins

Best New Folly Beach Spot  
11 Center Street  
11 Center St. Folly Beach 588-9898

Whodathunkit? New development on Folly Beach that we love ... and it's not even a cutoffs and beer joint!! These small plates are as good as most of the tapas in town. The wine store offers good choices at value-added prices. And the Greek plate is enough to make you holler "OPA!!" So grab a bottle by the neck and chow down in the sea breeze on the rooftop at 11 Center. You won't regret it. If it's winter, test drive the cool open fireplace out back. —Lee Jenkins

Best Chef Cause  
Lowcountry Food Bank  
1635 Cosgrove Ave. N. Charleston 747-8146

Peninsula Grill's Chef Robert Carter usually leads the charge, but the "Chefs' Feast" includes all the right players. From Phil Bardin to Bob Waggoner, all the big boys turn out for the Lowcountry Food Bank's annual Chefs' Feast. The feast gives chefs who get top dollar for their plates a chance to show off while raising dough for the most appropriate charity of all. They are specifically funding one of the Food Bank's programs called Kids' Café — an after-school snack program for kids who might not get any at home. You can feast, too, for \$100 bucks, but not 'til next year, as the annual event was just held on Feb. 20. —Lee Jenkins

Best Late-Night GRUB  
Pa Pa Zu Zu's  
310 King St. Downtown 534-1666

With some of the best hummus in town and gyros as big as your head, Pa Pa Zu Zu's might also qualify for "Best Smallest Joint in Town," with its narrow little slip next to Millennium Music on King Street just south of Calhoun. Anyway, the Greek-style menu is always wonderful, and available late night for those who are still running around downtown needing a nosh after bars close. —Lee Jenkins

Best Upscale '80s Dining Room  
Bohicket Grill  
1880 Andell Blvd. Johns Island 768-1500

After driving all the way to Bohicket Marina, we were surprised to find the fake flowers, brass-framed mirrors, and circa-1985 colors festooning the former Café St. Tropez. We'd long heard about a very snazzy place out by Seabrook, and once the plates came to the table, we understood what folks had been talking about. When the name changed to Bohicket Creek Grill, the food got edited, but it appears the dining room did not. We didn't care a bit — after the first bite, all we saw was the fantastic view of the marina. —Lee Jenkins

Best Yeast-Like Expansion  
Normandy Farm Artisan Bakery  
86 Society St. Downtown 577-5763 32  
Windermere Blvd. West Ashley 769-6400

And they deserve it. The two little guys on Society Street have been dishing out the best bread in town for several years now, and with the very appropriate acquisition of the Elliott Group's Ambrosia at South Windermere, they've broken into a new market altogether. Upscale restaurants and James Islanders alike will have equal access to the glutinous wonders of the artisan bakers of Normandy

Farm. —Lee Jenkins

Best Kudzu Chain  
Moe's Southwest Grill  
Various locations

Moe's Southwest Grill, with its "Subway" approach to Mexican food, has crawled across the Charleston area like kudzu, its growth unimpeded by a little lawsuit by the Jerry Garcia estate over the allegedly unauthorized use of his image. Their brand of pop culture-named food — served up cheap and quick in a big, bright dining room — has completely clicked with our market, going from one location to four in about as long as it takes to wrap a burrito. —Lee Jenkins

Best Place for Dilettantes  
Charleston Cooks!  
194 East Bay St. Downtown 722-1212

Once you've had all the Food Network you can stand, head on down to Charleston Cooks!, the Maverick Kitchens' newest venture on East Bay Street. The retail side is gorgeous and packed with all the best and most spiffy kitchen equipment and gadgets. The classroom side is a state-of-the-art demonstration kitchen, with gorgeous stoves and dishwashers displayed by a video system and surrounded by plenty of work space. It makes our former demo cooks want to weep with nostalgia. —Lee Jenkins

Best Seafood Disney world  
RB's Seafood Restaurant and Raw Bar  
97 Church St. Mt. Pleasant 881-0466

RB's put up a sign in its Shem Creek parking lot, "God willing and the 'creek' don't rise, we'll be open soon." Well, it came back in a flood of nautical tourist glory. The big plates of fried seafood, Venezuelan lump crabmeat cocktails, and enormous fish tanks provide the perfectly breathtaking tourist spot for feeling like you're near the water — in much the same way Disney makes you feel like you're in Europe at Epcot. It ain't the splintered-deck-feet-in-the-water kind of coastal experience we like, but the food's better than we expected it to be, and they handle kids well. Perfect for those who want to stop short of driving to Orlando. —Lee Jenkins

Best Cutest Little New Spot  
Bistro V  
520 Folly Road James Island 762-4722

The owners of Fulton Five decided to spawn a whole new business, and before you knew it, Bistro V took the teal-blue '80s-esque Angel Fish and turned it into a mini-Rue de Jean for James Island. They serve up a mean goat cheese salad and chicken panini for lunch in their newly spiffy setting, and most of the menu is under \$10. When it comes to a power lunch on James Island, Bistro V can't be beat. —Lee Jenkins

Best Menu Redo  
Blossom Café  
171 East Bay St. Downtown 722-9200

Blossom had been wilting until this year when Aaron Siegel came in with some menu "Miracle Gro," adding new seafood dishes and keeping the best of what was there before. A dining room redo did the same, warming up the previous atmosphere without looking like a complete makeover. It was subtle and just enough of a tune up. And we'll go back for Siegel's pommes frites with blue cheese or truffle oil any day of the week. —Lee Jenkins

Best Ladies' Lunch  
Cru Café  
18 Pinckney St. Downtown 534-2434

Cru Café, with its single-house porch situated at the corner of Pinckney and Anson streets, offers the most Charleston-esque spot for ladies to while away an afternoon — with an oriental chicken salad or club sandwich in hand, that is. It's perfect because the ladies can take a break in a perfectly pleasant atmosphere and still get a real lunch. Shoestring fries and a great burger feed those of us who are feeling more omnivorous, but the daintier members of the fairer sex can opt for the chicken pâté plate or something equally petite. —Lee Jenkins

Best Guacamole  
Santi's Restaurante Mexicano  
1302 Meeting St. Downtown 722-2633

We have a food writer on staff who, due to some extensive previous experience with the federal Avocado Commission of '74, proudly claims the title of "best American guacamole maker." Her friends agree, but Santi's totally kicks her ass. While she doesn't readily admit this, there's no escaping the chunky tender avocado, excess of lime juice, garlic, chiles, and cilantro that make Santi's the worthy recipient of the Best Guacamole award for 2004. ¡Bastardos! —Lee Jenkins

Most Anticipated James Island Eatery  
Juanita Greenberg's  
The Former Fish and Shrimp House on Folly Road

James Islanders can rejoice because Michael and Edie Rabin are expanding their funky food empire and bringing their own brand of Mexican goodness to Folly Road with a new Juanita Greenberg's. Gone is the creepy, deserted "Fish and Shrimp House" near Camp Road, and in comes affordable, tasty nachos, gooey queso, and of course, burritos the size of your head. If things keep up like this, people will have to say "there's nowhere to eat on James Island" through a mouthful of chips. —Scott Goodwin

Best Old Standby  
J. Bistro  
819 Coleman Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 971-7778

Incredible as it seems, J. Bistro is rapidly approaching its tenth year in operation. The restaurant made a name for itself in a matter of weeks, but 10 years later, it's still dependably good stuff. Chef James Burns' funky-yet-elegant space on Coleman Boulevard continues to turn out pretty plates of high-quality cooking at reasonable prices. The bar booths are still as comfy, the staff is still top-notch, and people continue to pack the place, which may explain its Readers' Pick as Best Mt. Pleasant Restaurant this year. There have been menu revisions (as if you wouldn't change anything over a whole decade), but everything remains true to the original concept — a high-value, high-class dining experience, every time. —Scott Goodwin

Best Old-Fashioned Restaurant  
Tom Portaro's Italian Restaurant  
5600 Rivers Ave. N. Charleston 747-1128

For all the neo-gentrification going on in many N. Charleston neighborhoods, finding a comfortable, competent restaurant there remains an annoying challenge. Tucked into an unassuming spot on Rivers Avenue within sight of I-526, lies Tom Portaro's. "Since 1960" says the sign, and it's the truth, although they had to move to their present location a few years back to accommodate the Mark Clark's construction. What has remained the same for some 45 years is

good, old-fashioned southern Italian cooking. The red sauce is classic, the meatballs are excellent, and the chiantis come in woven baskets. The dining room is a total throwback, too — not much has changed here since the highway came through, but it suits the place just fine. Most customers seem to be regulars, and everybody's treated that way, whether it's their first visit or their third time that week. When you're too tired to cook, grab the spouse (and the kids) and head to Portaro's. It's a blast from the past and a satisfying, all-American/Italian meal rolled into one. —Scott Goodwin

**Best Place to Go When 'Skipping Class'**  
Poe's Tavern  
2210 Middle St. Sullivan's Island 883-0083

A long lunch at Poe's on Sullivan's Island is always a choice move. A little sun, a little Bud-heavy, and a little cruise-by action ... what more could you want? Especially when this cozy island spot, known for its long happy hour, turns into a lively hot spot upon sundown. —Ida Becker

**Best N. Charleston Joint for real beef-head tacos**  
Los Reyes  
7620 Rivers Ave. N. Charleston 824-6422

The decor looks like it's been ordered from "Mexican Restaurants 'R' Us," and the menu comes from the same mysterious printing press that prints all Mexican menus. But the food is clearly a cut above the others. While the menu has an array of the standard combinations ("I'll have a No. 16, please"), the tacos are great, and the specialties menu bears special consideration. You'll still be comforted by the availability of that No. 16 — but if you want a real beef head taco, or a whole fried fish, you've got the option. —Scott Goodwin?

**Best Food on the Go**  
Bull Street Gourmet  
60 Bull St. Downtown 720-8992

Our pick for the best place to go to beat the crowds in your quest for a great sandwich is Bull Street Gourmet, a homey shop on the corner of Smith and Bull, which may be the only place in town where you can you walk away with a homemade sandwich or salad, two bottles of wine for \$10, and the rest of your groceries for the week all in one stop. —Erica Harris

**Best Lunch Ladies**  
Ye Olde Fashioned  
474 Savannah Hwy. West Ashley 766-4854

The women of the West Ashley Ye Olde Fashioned drive-thru always remember your order and are quick to ask, "Want your usual, honey?" The cringe factor of being identified as a regular only comes into play when you are in the company of the opposite sex, whom you are trying to impress, and your usual happens to be the Gold-Digger Sundae with extra nuts. —Ida Becker

**Best Place to Pretend You're From the Old Country**  
Gelateria Modica  
41-A George St. Downtown 723-8868

From freshly made gelato, espresso, and warm paninis fashioned from basil, sopressata sausage, and fresh mozzarella on bread from Normandy Farm, this little Italian café provides the authenticity that will have Spoleitians talking timeshare. — Tracey Palmer

**Best Wine Guy**  
Matt McKeown  
Charleston Wine Traveler

Every time we run into this guy, we can't get over how excited he is about wine. From Spain to Chile, Matt can spend hours just talking about grapes, which isn't a bad thing if you're looking to expand your knowledge of the good stuff. With a side business called the Charleston Wine Traveler and a regular gig managing the wine bar and lounge at McCrady's, Matt spends his waking moments drinking, pouring, and talking about wine. And you'll never go wrong with his recommendations. The guy knows his stuff. —Stephanie Barna

Best Use of the Internet  
Buying Coconut Cake  
[www.peninsulagrill.com](http://www.peninsulagrill.com)

Back in 1998 when the CP celebrated its very first birthday, the nice folks at Peninsula Grill sent us an entire coconut cake along with a signed copy of the recipe that had run in our cuisine section (that's right, we have the recipe!). From that moment, even though we made ourselves sick eating that damn cake, we were hooked. Every time we go out to eat, no matter if it's upscale or low brow, we trek to Peninsula, belly up the bar, order a coffee and Bailey's, and devour a magnificent slice of cake. Recently, we happened upon Peninsula's website, where the cake has top billing. Now, those from "off" can get a true taste of Charleston (forget shrimp and grits — coconut cake's where it's at) for a mere \$75 plus shipping. Money well spent is all we can say. —Stephanie Barna

Best Free Samples  
Whole Foods  
923 Houston Northcutt Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 971-7240

They say don't go to the grocery store when you're hungry. But if you're heading to Whole Foods, go starving — you can pick up a free meal while shopping. They've smartly organized their free samples into courses you can enjoy while you follow the store's flow. First, when you walk in you can reach into the R2-D2 head cover that protects a plate full of plump grapes, just like you'd serve before the cheese and crackers (samples of which Whole Foods provides at the store's rear). You'll find your main course as you make your way to the registers: a smattering of dipping sauces on fresh French bread, and don't forget the red pepper hummus for your protein. For dessert, enjoy some almond butter, and surely the barrista at the coffee counter will give you a small sample of the day's special before you check out (if you've actually bought anything). — Spencer Deering

Best Time to Buy a Fish Taco  
Sundays at Coast  
39 John St. Downtown 722-8838

These ain't yo' momma's fish tacos, thank goodness, but they're still cheap. Sundays at Coast features \$3 fish tacos with mango salsa. Fishing around town for fish tacos can work up a thirst. So check out their heavily discounted Sunday wine menu too. But make sure you share a bottle with somebody or it might be you in the tank. —Benjamin Schlau

Best Cheese Fries  
Gene's Haufbrau  
817 Savannah Hwy. West Ashley 225-4363

Getting your fingers hot and messy never tasted so good. After crawling through many bars and tasting many a cheese fry, we're prepared to go on record as having said that Gene's Haufbrau makes the best cheese fries in town. Gene's fries are served on a huge platter with melted cheddar, bacon, and scallions with a huge bowl of ranch dressing on the side. Eat them with some decently prized

booze and they're awesome. Take notice; these are not "freedom fries" because you will be enslaved until you finish the plate. —Benjamin Schlau

**Best Dinner Entertainment**

Jazz Tuesdays at FIG

232 Meeting St. Downtown 805-5900

Food, like jazz, is good at the Meeting Street eatery FIG. Put them together and they get better. Every Tuesday night at 8 p.m., College of Charleston professor of percussion Quentin Baxter does much more than set the tempo on drums with the jazz ensemble Gradual Lean, as FIG spices up its already delicious flavors with music that climaxes at midnight. Bon appetite. Bon musique. Bon amusez. —Benjamin Schlau

**Best Breakfast Biscuit**

Hominy Grill

207 Rutledge Ave. Downtown 937-0930

Big as a hamburger but won't give you that fast-food rotgut. For a mere \$3.95, you can get a big, juicy, homemade sausage and egg biscuit at Hominy Grill, located at the corner of Cannon Street and Rutledge Avenue. Just don't tell your cardiologist who sent you. —Benjamin Schlau

**Best All-In-One Lunchtime Destination**

Millennium Music/Five Loaves Café

372 King St. Downtown 722-1000

Forget the old stereotypes that Southerners do everything slow. It's certainly not the case in Charleston, where drivers are more concerned with getting where they need to be than the pedestrian they nearly took out three blocks back. Sometimes you need to detox from your busy schedules and lengthy to-do lists, and a trip to Millennium Music can help you do it. With good music playing throughout the store, and the wide assortment of books and music to browse, it's easy to forget you are just steps from one of the busiest areas of the city. After selecting a new book to spend your lunch hour reading, you can nosh on a bowl of warm, homemade soup from Five Loaves Café in the center of the store, or fill up on one of their hearty sandwiches. This is one of those rare places where it's not awkward to go solo. In fact, it gives you a chance to read over the quotes painted throughout the café. Before you leave, you can pick out the perfect CD to help make your transition into your busy world of e-mail and deadlines just a little bit more enjoyable. —Erica Harris

**Best Makeover**

Voodoo

15 Magnolia Road West Ashley 769-0228

This summer, the Magnolia Road spot in West Ashley housed the dumpy, divey, and deliciously durrrry Johnny Ola's Anchor Café — the focus was on the friends and the music, not the atmosphere. Jump to the present and the place looks like a tiki god exploded in it. Slick new bamboo flooring, large velvet curtains, mod circular holes cut into the space's dividing wall, and shelves lined with ceramic tiki tchotkes all contribute to the feeling that you've stepped into another dimension. "Hip" and "hot" are two words that may no longer be exclusive to downtown. —Shawnté Salabert

**Best Tempura**

Sushi Hiro

298 King St. Downtown 723-3628

Tempura's a delicate thing. Too fried and it gets greasy. Too light and it tastes

bland. Sushi Hiro has perfected the simple art of tempura (vegetable is the best in our opinion) that features large pieces of onion, sweet potato, and other goods coated with a light, crunchy, slightly salty batter. The appetizer can be shared, but be warned, once you take the first bite you might get a little territorial. — Shawnté Salabert

**Best Budget-Busting Soup**  
Mushroom Soup at Kennedy's Bakery and Market  
60 Calhoun St. Downtown 723-2026

Sure, their sandwiches are scrumptious and their baked good are delicious, but nothing comes close to the potage champignon at Kennedy's Market. Crammed full of expertly seasoned and sautéed mushrooms, this soup is absolutely divine. Skip the smaller container and go for a full quart — it's expensive, but damn, it's good. —Shawnté Salabert

**Best Wine Deal**  
Total Wine & More  
1820 Ashley River Rd. West Ashley 763-7034

Total Wine & More offers wine freaks and oeno-novices the knockout combination of a huge selection and rock-bottom prices. (According to employees, wines marked "ineligible for case discount" say so because they're already selling at wholesale cost!) The professional staff can help you navigate the 14,000-odd square feet of space, and even if you can't tell your Beaujolais from your Barbaresco, they'll show you an array of things you'll like within your budget. There's even a catalog of sorts available as you walk in the door, offering ratings and descriptions of most of the wines in the store from the major wine publications. There's a comprehensive beer selection in singles and six-packs, and there's a similarly huge liquor selection just an acrylic wall away, "next door." In a few short months, Total Wine has become the hands-down destination for wine (and more) on the cheap, with the happy additions of huge selection and customer service thrown in for free. —Scott Goodwin

**Best Dead Restaurant Name**  
Get Your Eat On  
2405 Spruill Ave. N. Charleston 744-0004

Halfway between Park Circle and downtown, amid the abandoned houses and crumbling storefronts that line Spruill Avenue, there is a once-white building emblazoned with a large hand-painted and highly stylized sign that reads, "Get Your Eat On." One is moved to think as one drives by, "How nice that this neighborhood places such value on nutrition!" As it turns out, Get Your Eat On is not an endorsement of better eating, but a restaurant. Well, was a restaurant. We couldn't wait to see what they might be actually serving, but, alas, GYEO is no more. The phone number is disconnected, the "eat getting on" room dark. But it doesn't stop it from being the best name for a restaurant we've heard in a long, long time. —Scott Goodwin

**Best 11th-Hour Save**  
Your Place  
40 N. Market St. Downtown 722-8360

Some of us in Charleston can still remember the good ol' days. We're talking about the days back before cholesterol was invented. Back then, you could eat a half-pound, hand-pattied beef burger on a white flour (carbs, egad!) bun with a side of fried onion rings with complete impunity. When it looked like our favorite hamburger place was about to close last December, many of us wondered aloud where we would go to introduce our children to the world of arterial blockage. So we bum-rushed the joint, jamming it full until well after 3 p.m. many days. We (Charleston, collectively) ate there so much so quickly, that a local horse carriage

tour guide was able to help broker a deal between Your Place and its current home in the Rainbow Market shopping nook on The Market. Thank god, because it was beginning to feel like a rhino was sitting on the left side of my chest instead of an elephant. —Bill Davis

Best Place to Get Takeout  
Jasmine Thai  
807 Folly Road James Island 406-2978

The little Thai restaurant that could has become James Island's best place to order takeout from. Call ahead, give it 45 minutes, and then pick up your pad Thai or your massaman, and enjoy. (We dare you to resist nibbling all the way home.) —Bill Davis

Best Place to Eat Out  
The Landing Strip  
2460 Remount Road N. Charleston 747-4114

Do we really have to make this joke? OK, it's a strip joint and a steakhouse. Get it? Eat out? Surf and turf, anyone? Tip your bartender ... drive safe. —Bill Davis

Best Cursed Retail Location  
275 King St.  
Downtown

See "Best Sticker Campaign." Something nasty must have happened in this building during the years when it stood empty and abandoned, part of the historic Kress Building complex at Wentworth and King. The succession of bars and restaurants that have bit the dust trying to make something work on this corner can only be explained by invoking the supernatural. (Or could it be lame ideas, incompetent management, and a revenue stream that forever seems to disappear up somebody's nose?) —Patrick Sharbaugh

Best Empty Space in Desperate Need of a Tenant  
39 Hudson St.  
Downtown

Better known as the old Club Tango location, this massive, three-floored, atrium-ceilinged space was downtown's closest facsimile to a New York-style dance club until the owner apparently got on the wrong side of los federales in February 2003. In short order, the club closed and legions of fishnet-and-heel-wearing North Chucksters were left licking their long pinky fingernails in sullen dismay. Since then, the place has sat empty, doing little more than giving 275 King Street a run for Best Cursed Location. Who owns it? Who the hell knows. But somebody, please do something with this room. —Patrick Sharbaugh

Best Place for a Young Woman to get Her Ass Pinched  
Meritäge  
235 East Bay St. Downtown 723-8181

Well-heeled young ladies often venture out to Meritäge for a weekend soirée with friends and maybe even a little love from the cute — albeit a bit cheesy — guys at the bar. They don't go to endure slimy old dudes who think they're cool 'cause they're wearing a (budget) Rolex and have a spec house in l'On. Worse yet, they think every babe's into them, and they give the "girls" a little goose! Who are these guys? Frankly, we think it's a case of revenge of the nerds. —Spencer Deering

Best Bartender  
City Councilman Kwadjo Campbell at LJ's  
587 King St. Downtown 532-9889

Go to LJ's on Upper King Street on the right night, and you can order a White Russian from the ersatz City Councilman, who has been known to bend the elbow in his own right. The conversation is sure to be lively, but just don't ask him for job or child-support advice. (And don't ask him if he's doing anything but working off the books for cash, either — bad form, and you may already know the answer.) —Bill Davis

Best Place to Bring Your Sharpie  
Big John's Tavern  
251 East Bay St. Downtown 723-3483

You don't need to be in your Sunday best to have a cold one in this downtown watering hole. Big John's, known as "Charleston's Best Dive since '55," has held down the corner of East Bay and Pinckney streets for a little more than 50 years. This place is full of cold brew, a smooth old jukebox, graffiti wallpaper, and a ceiling from which dozens of women's brassieres hang like party streamers. Most importantly, don't forget your Sharpie so that you can leave a little clever something on the tavern's walls. —Stephanie Braswell

Best Bar To Be a Snob In  
High Cotton  
199 East Bay St. Downtown 724-3815

The drinks are pricey, the crowd is good-lookin', and the seats are luxurious. There's often a snazzy little jazz singer, and you hardly ever see a fanny-pack tourist from Ohio cramming a big beer belly up to the bar. So put on your good shoes and best haircut to show up for a nice cocktail and tiny little cheese plate and be seen with the best of them. —Lee Jenkins

Best Bar to Be Seen In  
Oak Steakhouse  
17 Broad St. Downtown 722-4220

The 45-degree banquettes are perfect spots to chat and still be able to watch who's going by. Financial planners with big family names hang out in ratty T-shirts and tennis shoes, and most everyone comes in with that "I'm looking around" face — the one that wants to see who else is cool enough to be hanging out in Brett's new shop. The \$15 appetizers and ability to buy your own wine locker on the third floor cinch it — Oak is no place for the faint of heart, or of wallet. —Lee Jenkins

Best Bar Scene  
39 Rue de Jean  
39 John St. Downtown 722-8881

It cranks up every day about 6 p.m. — this crowd is a little more populist than High Cotton's, but it's still crammed full of attractive hipsters having a good time together. The sushi makes a great snack, there's usually someone interesting to chat with, and the French bistro décor makes 39 Rue de Jean (or simply "Rue," as it's known to those who frequent it) feel like a little vacation on a weeknight — and you never know which hottie might notice you on that random Wednesday. —Lee Jenkins

Best Expansion  
Il Cortile Del Re  
193-A King St. Downtown 853-1888

Il Cortile Del Re used to be just the most romantic place in downtown to eat. But since Massimo added a narrow little wine bar with great photographs by John Carroll Doyle and about six tables, it's now an excellent place to hook up with a

friend or business associate and enjoy a plate of olives and cheese or a more filling dinner — and the sexy little courtyard is still there for those dates with more ambitious agendas. —Lee Jenkins

Best Bar Top  
Cypress  
167 East Bay St. Downtown 727-0111

God, we love the bar at Cypress. And we don't mean the atmosphere, which is the perfect cross between warehouse loft and the Ten Forward deck of the Starship Enterprise. We mean the actual bar top. It's a brown-veined marble slab lit from beneath, offering a warm glow that bridges the gap between the über-contemporary lights and chairs and the exposed brick walls and timbers. You can look down over the kitchen while slurping a good glass of wine and bowl of wonderful lobster bisque and enjoy Cypress at its best. —Lee Jenkins

Best Bar to Land a Sugar Daddy  
Zinc Bistro and Bar  
28-A Bridgeside Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 216-9330

Zinc is a gorgeous bar at the edge of the Cooper River, and its convenient location at the foot of the Motley Rice building makes it the Mt. Plastic equivalent to the bar where all the old Ally McBeal attorneys hung out and hooked up back in their Fox network days. The people are just about as attractive, and once the anti-terrorist suit the legions of legal eagles at Motley Rice are pursuing starts to pay off (as the class-action asbestos suit did, and how), there's no reason not to go panning for gold on the banks of the Cooper. —Lee Jenkins

Best Shots  
Kim's Express  
145 Calhoun St. Downtown 577-7129

If you need a little help getting your night started but can't bear to fork out \$8 for those Red-Headed Sluts you love so much, head over to Kim's Express on Calhoun for 75-cent sake shots and save the extra cash for your late-night grub. Not only are they the cheapest shots in town, but you won't have to walk far to the bars, with Bar 145 and The Terrace located directly above this place. You can pay 75 cents per shot, or splurge for the \$5 bottle of sake (enough for at least five or six sake shots). On Fridays Kim's stays open until 3 a.m. (though the well runs dry at 2 a.m. like everywhere else), so you can continue the party there and nosh on their tasty Korean-Japanese fare after the bars close. If you're lucky, your picture may make it onto Kim's "Hall of Fame" — though after checking out some of the pictures, some may more appropriately consider it the Wall of Shame. —Erica Harris

Best Bar to Pick a Fight with a Republican  
Blind Tiger Pub  
38 Broad St. Downtown 577-0088

The Tiger's Broad Street address makes it a natural destination for lawyers, and the pub seems to have become a haven for young Republicans, college Republicans, and the unapologetically Republican staff of the Charleston Mercury. Given these odds, you're certain to find a slew of GOPers here any night of the week. Even so, there are almost always just as many enlightened progressive types hanging at the Tiger, so you're sure to be backed up in most any argument you start with a stick-in-the-mud conservative. Be careful, though. The presence of the Mercury staff makes it likely that any altercation will be reported in the "Lowcountry Rambler" — and the trouncing you gave your illiberal friend may read a bit differently from the way you recall it. —Anna Hofford

Best PLACE To See Inappropriate ShagGing

Henry's on the Boulevard  
816 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 971-1777

There's an amusing greasiness in the vibe of this Mt. Pleasant lounge, for sure, but the real fun lies in watching the dance floor action. At times, older locals stricken with dance fever seem determined to shag to funk standards like Rick James' "Super Freak" and the Jackson 5's "Give Me One More Chance" — with hilarious results. Well, if the cover band doesn't know any Chairmen of the Board, you gotta make do. —T. Ballard Lesemann

Best Way To Get Ignored At a Townie Bar  
Waving Dollar Bills

Even if it's a Benjamin, it's obnoxious and rude to lean over a bar waving a handful of currency — or a credit card, for that matter — at your bartender at any time. If you insist on this type of childish act, you're certain to be aggressively overlooked, and/or receive a sloppy cocktail for your efforts. Also unacceptable: snapping, waving, shouting "Over here!" and grabbing. Get some manners, folks. It's not enough to simply be of age; it's crucial to learn how to behave at a bar. On the other hand, bartenders can often be as classless and rude as the clientele, since none of the above strictures seem to apply if you have tits out to here. —T. Ballard Lesemann

Best New Place to Drink on the Water  
Fleet Landing  
186 Concord St. Downtown 722-8100

For those of us who are too old to wear jeans to work but young enough to want a beer after work on the water, Fleet Landing is the perfect solution. Up 'til now, Salty Mike's splintery picnic tables near the marina were the only place to sit with a cold one, stare at the water, and let go of the day. But now, thanks to Fleet, we don't have to worry about snagging our skirts, and if we happen to want a nice glass of wine instead of a PBR, we're all set. We can't wait 'til the days are warm and they open up the garage-door walls to let in the breezes (and the occasional seagull or two!). —Lee Jenkins

Best Place to Act Like a Lush and Dance Like a Fool  
The Living Room  
54 John St. Downtown 965-5254

Patrons of The Living Room tend to be a very random crowd, so you can usually mingle fairly anonymously throughout the night. Also, there is almost always live music, whether it's a DJ or a punk band, making it the ideal place for those crazy nights when you partake in incoherent slurring and Elaine-like dancing. So go ahead, have a few too many and free your inner dancing queen — The Living Room ensures anonymity in your drinking escapades. —Anna Hofford

Best Place to DROP \$10 on a Drink  
Voodoo  
15 Magnolia Rd. West Ashley 769-0228

West Ashley's new swanky spot, Voodoo, does not mess around with its tiki theme. The decorators must have swapped some serious dough for the bar's large assortment of tiki-ware, which might explain some of the badass prices on the fruity drink menu. You could easily drop \$10 on a massive drink, but the sugar coma and drunk expression on your face afterwards might justify handing over that Hamilton. —Shawnté Salabert

Best Parking Illusion  
Avondale Station  
828 Savannah Hwy. West Ashley 377-1300

On first approach to Avondale Station (situated on the corner of Savannah Highway and Magnolia Road), the parking lot appears quite spacious — but this turns out to be a particularly nasty illusion. In fact, the lot contains only a meager 21 parking spaces. What's with the insistence on having a big landscaped lawn in front of the restaurant and a plethora of palm trees? This is all space that could have been used for jamming in more auto... Hold on ... shudder. This must be what it feels like to be a soulless real estate developer. Forget we brought it up. Bring on the landscaping; screw the cars. —Michael Staton

**Best Sunday Morning Drink Spot**  
The Terrace's Bloody Mary Bar  
145 Calhoun St. (Top Level) Downtown 937-0314

There's nothing like a good, stiff drink at 11 a.m., are we agreed? Particularly if it's a Sunday, and you've got a hangover like God's own revenge. A nice Bloody Mary is a welcome way to kick back for anyone, be they churchgoer or late-night carouser. The Terrace's Sunday Blue Jean Brunch is a good option for those who like an informal, open-air, buffet-style breakfast, but it's their superb Bloody Mary Bar where the real action's at. For \$3, customers get a highball glass of vodka and ice; the rest is up to them. The bar includes hot sauces, olives, celery, banana peppers, jalapeños, brand-name Bloody mixes, and more. It's always wise to add liquor to breakfast, but Bloody Marys make you look classy in a way that a liter of scotch and corn flakes never could have. —Michael Staton

**Best Place to Make Your Move**  
Back Table on Blind Tiger's Patio  
38 Broad St. Downtown 577-0088

The Broad Street lawyer crowd gathers in the front bar after work, but the smooth and seductive parties know to head out back to the starlit patio area. As the minutes tick closer to 2 a.m., secure a spot at one of the plastic tables at the very end of the patio and get to it, man. The crowds tend to congregate near the bar or space heaters, so you'll have that cozy end section all to yourself. —Shawnté Salabert

**Most Refreshing New Drink to Hit King Street**  
Little Thai Too's Lycheetini  
350 King St. Downtown 723-4990

The exotic Lycheetini cocktail at Little Thai Too is our new favorite swanky aperitif. While the servers are quick to steer patrons away from certain martini options on the plentiful specialty menu (apparently some drinks were created on a whim and not necessarily by taste-test) this one is a favorite among many a downtown scenester. The drink's foundation is the lychee, a small heart-shaped fruit native to low elevations of the provinces of Guandong and Fuchien in southern China, though today grown in Florida and several other states. Add one part lychee juice to three parts Absolut vodka, garnish with a slice of sweet lychee fruit, and voila: instant exoticism, a perfect match for the classy Indonesian decor of Little Thai Too's swanky King Street lounge. —Ida Becker

**Best Bar Gimmick**  
Casino Night at the Upper Deck Tavern  
353 King St. Downtown 958-0002

I recently found out that my late grandfather had a small gambling addiction problem. After discovering a taste for the spoils of a lucky night playing Texas Hold 'Em, I knew that same lust was borne in my blood, too. Luckily for me, the Upper Deck holds Casino Night on the last Wednesday of every month, which involves getting chips when you walk in the door and picking your poison. Will it be blackjack, craps, Hold 'Em, roulette, or Let It Ride? Do well enough (or buy

enough drinks; you get more chips for every beverage) and get into the \$100 cash prize Hold 'Em game at the end of the night. Easy money, baby. Yeah. — Sara Miller

Best Last Call Announcement  
Circus Music at A.C.'s  
467 King St. Downtown 577-6742

The urge to punch a bouncer in the face may become strongest at the end of a long night spent boozing it up and trying to get some hot jerk to ask whether you need a "ride home," or at least for your number. But A.C.'s has taken the anger out of last call with their strategy for pushing crowds out the door: turning on all the lights and cranking up the volume on that hideous circus music from Monty Python's Flying Circus. It's pretty hard to want to punch someone when you're thinking about the Pythons. —Sara Miller

Smartest Bartender  
Jeopardy Justin at A.C.'s  
467 King St. Downtown 577-6742

The Jeopardy! bus visited Charleston late in 2004, and, after making it past the first round, the numbers of younger contestant hopefuls dwindled considerably. The young man sitting next to me during the test looked every bit a Jeopardy! winner: nice button-down, clean-shaven with a wholesome gleam in his eye. After the test, which he passed (some of us from the CP were not so fortunate), we chatted for a minute when he let fly that he worked at A.C.'s. This was Justin, the tattooed drink-slinger behind the bar? Yes, indeed. Don't try taking this guy on in trivia, seriously. —Sara Miller

Best Original Shot by a Local Bartender  
Orange Julius by Frank at Bert's Bar  
2209 Middle St. Sullivan's Island 883-3924

Remember Orange Dreamcicles? Bartender Frank "FUCA" Trubio has created a shot reminiscent of those luscious summer treats, only better. Frank's Orange Julius beats the fruity drinks at the mall by a long shot. But you'll have to visit Frank at Bert's on Sullivan's Island to taste this bit of heaven. Trust us, we've tried to get other bartenders to make it. Nada. —Kristen George

Best Out-of-Town-Sports-Team Bar  
Blue's House of Wings  
1039 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. Mt. Pleasant 881-1858

Walk into Blues on a Sunday wearing anything other than Pittsburgh Steelers black and gold, and you might regret it. Steelers fans can't go wrong with this cozy tavern located in the Anna Knapp Shopping Plaza off Highway 17 in Mt. P. You can get buckets of Steel City favorite Iron City Beer, purchase a Terrible Towel, and sing along with the Steelers' fight song during commercial breaks. Feels just like you're back in the 'burgh. Who knew there were this many Steelers fans in the Lowcountry? —Kristen George