



twenty yummy places

Kansas has always been and continues to be an agricultural state. And where food is grown, it is appreciated and served with love. All across the state you can find local diners, cafés and food trucks building a base of loyal customers by specializing in local fare with innovative approaches. In these pages, *KANSAS!* magazine readers and gourmands helped us honor some of the best local eateries across the state.

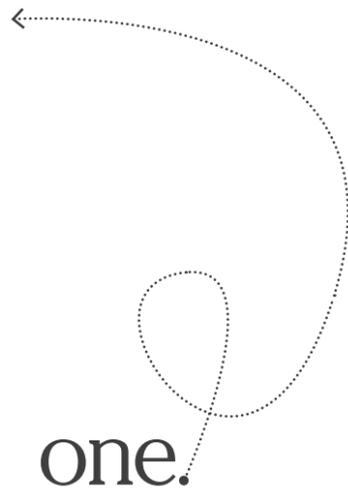
Last January to March, our magazine encouraged readers to submit nominations for their favorite local restaurants in Kansas. We received more than 100 nominations

through the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism website, our Facebook page, written ballots and phone calls. A clear majority of votes came from within the state, but relocated Kansans and Kansas-lovers in 15 states as far-flung as Washington and Virginia also voiced their picks.

The tally left us with some close results, including a three-way tie for the 50th slot. So we took the top 53 nominations and held daily online voting from March to May that led to our final readers' choice list. We were delighted at the variety of winning eateries, both in terms of geography and the types of food they serve.

So thanks to you, our readers, for helping us to honor these Kansas kitchens. You will probably find several you know and a few you will want to visit based on the recommendations from readers in other regions of the state. Happy travels ... and enjoy the meals to come!

The top twenty eateries are listed on the following pages in random order.



THREE ONE ONE

What happens when you bring a Key West palate to the Midwest? Former Floridian Helen Darrington and chef John Shaft answered that question when they opened Three One One in March 2016. The Abilene restaurant, whose name comes from a street address, offers what Darrington calls “tried and true Midwestern fare,” but specializes in seafood dishes, varying the menu based on the best fresh selections available. Mahi-mahi, however, is always on the menu, served either as a sandwich, taco or dinner filet; patrons often pair it with the “royal” or “fire” fries, topped with fresco cheese, scallions and pulled pork or brisket. Drinks include a mixture of Hawaiian and local craft brews, along with Land Shark lager, the beer backed by Key West musical legend Jimmy Buffett. It pairs well with Kansas.

311 N. Spruce St. | Abilene
(785) 200-6762



AMANDA'S BAKERY & CAFÉ

In the heart of downtown Emporia, this beloved bakery pairs sandwiches and drinks with a line of what it describes as “to-die-for desserts.” If we had to choose a culinary hill to die on, it would be Amanda’s signature cinnamon rolls. As big as the West, the rolls are baked fresh in Amanda’s kitchen and served up with the Flint Hills sunrise.

702 Commercial St. | Emporia
(620) 340-0620



THE COACHLIGHT RESTAURANT

Cars with out-of-county tags fill much of Longford’s downtown area on Sundays as loyal patrons flow into the Coachlight Restaurant to fill their platter-sized plates from a plentiful, all-you-can-eat buffet. The friendly service and that buffet—with popular dishes such as fried chicken, hand-breaded chicken fried steak, hamburgers made from local beef, and freshly prepared vegetable, bean and pasta salads—have made this rural eatery a dining destination.

According to current owner, Amy Wayman, her staff is dedicated to the restaurant’s longtime motto, “Good food, friendly people.” Talented Coachlight cooks peel and mash potatoes daily and make home-style sausage gravy every Saturday morning. They chop cabbage and top it with a secret slaw dressing made from an original hand-written recipe while the pea salad comes from another vintage recipe.

Lunch options consist of a variety of sandwiches and daily specials that range from homemade chicken and noodles, creamed chicken over biscuits, liver and onions, to ham and beans with combread. There’s a special every evening, such as Mexican food on Wednesdays and BBQ ribs on Saturday. Desserts



By Meta Newell West

might be freshly baked fruit cobblers or bread pudding, and there’s always pie—meringue-topped coconut cream, chocolate peanut butter, cherry pie à la mode, and occasionally rhubarb or gooseberry. The pie never lasts long, so consider the advice of the regulars and reserve a slice at the beginning of your meal.

Located off the beaten path, in a small town with fewer than 100 residents, the Coachlight has been open since 1976 when the building was constructed as part of the town’s bicentennial building project. According to Wava Kramer, past owner of Coachlight, word-of-mouth recommendations have made the restaurant a regional favorite—and a tradition for some.

Kansas State University student Hayden Heigele says his family has been eating there for decades. He looks forward to returning to Longford, where he often meets his grandfather for meals that satisfy his hometown appetite.

“It’s country food at its best,” says Heigele.

114 Weda St. | Longford
(785) 388-2437

Calls ahead are appreciated but it’s first-come, first-served

three. NATE'S PLACE

Nestled in the Lyons Twin Mansions in Fort Scott, Nate’s Place is a gem, according to locals. The bed and breakfast is made up of two mansions built in 1876 and maintained with care. Whether you’re looking for homemade granola or a pan-fried breakfast pork chop, Nate’s Place provides. Lunchtime selections include soups, salads, sandwiches and pastas. Try the blue cheese nachos or a cup of the famous tomato basil soup. Fine dining is available by reservation and includes a selection of local wines and wine pairings upon request.

750 S. National Ave. | Fort Scott | (620) 223-3644



five. WAGON WHEEL CAFE

Celebrating 66 years of business, Wagon Wheel in Marysville is deeply loved by locals. Want to find out why? Order the tri-tip sandwich or drunken chicken. And don’t skip dessert! The carrot cake is decadent and worth every bite. Wagon Wheel is the kind of place where the staff takes the time to get to know the customers. And manager Lori Snellings can take up to 20 orders without a pen and paper, getting each right every time. It’s the real deal for down-home food and quality service. Let’s hope they stick around for at least another 66 years.

703 Broadway | Marysville | (785) 562-3784

PHOTOGRAPHS (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT): Justin Lister (2), Dave Leiker, Justin Lister (2), Stacy McGrath, Kenny Felt



six.

LOPEZ DE MEXICO

By Kelly Gibson

Anne Pruett's restaurant journey started with genealogy. Her heritage is Mexican on her mother's side and Czechoslovakian on her father's side.

"I just never really realized that we were so diverse," Pruett says. "My grandparents' recipes would be all but lost if I didn't start learning how to fix food like them."

Pruett was especially interested in her Mexican heritage and knew she needed to learn how to cook directly from her maternal grandparents, so she started learning the basics. Her husband floated the idea of starting a restaurant, and that's how Lopez de Mexico began.

Now, 21 years later, Pruett has mastered her grandparents' techniques. Her grandmother, who turned 102 in August, still spends time at the restaurant.

"When we opened, my grandpa was still alive," Pruett says. "He had a job to do, and that was to make the mole sauce. And my grandma made the pork chili. We wanted to include them because these are their recipes."

Pruett's grandmother was the first of her family born in the United States. Following the railroad to Horton, Kansas, her family came originally from Guanajuato, located in central Mexico. Her grandparents eventually found their way to Atchison.

Cooking is in Pruett's blood. Her grandfather was known around the local foundry for his tortillas

and tamales. Her progression into the restaurant business was a natural fit.

"I love doing some of the basic traditional things, like Mexican rice or fideo, which is kind of like a Mexican spaghetti," Pruett says. "We would let people sample it until they figured out they liked it."

Most of the recipes Pruett uses at Lopez de Mexico were never written down. She had to watch her grandparents as they made each dish to make sure she had the right techniques. Now she is a master at tweaking recipes to best introduce traditional Mexican dishes to the people of Atchison. This summer, she served Mexican corn on a trial basis. She hopes it catches on and she can make it a seasonal menu item in the future.

"Mexican food is really broad," Pruett says. "I let everybody have their own opinion. It really depends on what they've been exposed to."

Tacos remain one of the most popular menu items. Lopez de Mexico has a unique way of stuffing and seasoning the tacos, and they like to experiment with different tortillas and flavorings. The pork chili is another local favorite—one that Pruett is glad the community embraced.

112 S. 6th St. | Atchison
(913) 367-2422



THE GATHERING PLACE

Aptly named, The Gathering Place in Stafford strives to be the local hangout. They serve breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as the occasional live music jam session. According to loyal customers, the cinnamon rolls alone at The Gathering Place are worth the drive, but they also have an enticing list of pies and dishes made to order.

105 N. Main St. | Stafford | (620) 234-5400



seven.



eight.

WILLIE'S SPORTS PUB

Though not an Atchison original, Willie's is an Atchison landmark. The restaurant started in 2001 in Manhattan, where owner DJ Bruce went to college. In 2010, he and his wife moved to back home to Atchison and opened another Willie's location. The Manhattan location closed in 2015, but Atchison's Willie's serves original dishes, plus some new-hometown favorites, such as the pork tenderloin.

"It was a mistake not putting the tenderloin on the menu at first. Every restaurant in Atchison has one, but it's by far one of our best-selling dishes."

—DJ Bruce

And if you decide the pork tenderloin is what you want (and let's be honest, you probably do), come hungry or split it with a friend. It's not for the faint of heart.

701 Commercial St. | Atchison
(913) 367-2900

PHOTOGRAPHS (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) Sarah Reeves (4), Brian Pitts (2), Katherine Bach, Deborah Walker



nine.

HOMESTEAD BAKERY

Great coffee? Excellent pastries? Hometown vibe? What more could you ask for in a local bakery? Decorated with local art and photography, this small coffee shop in downtown Baldwin City is comfortable and welcoming. Lori Gardner opened Homestead in 2012 with an aim to provide food made from organic grains and wholesome ingredients. Offering fresh bread, pastries and weekly lunch specials, the menu won't disappoint. And in winter, Homestead serves up warm soups daily.

719 Eighth St. | Baldwin City
(785) 766-3442

BACK ALLEY PIZZA

Pizza is simple: crust, sauce, cheese and your choice of toppings. But Back Alley Pizza in Newton demands quality and integrity in their ingredients, and it shows. They take the best of the best and then cook it over a wood fire for optimal crunch and freshness. Pick from their toppings combinations, or select your own. Family friendly with a fun environment, Back Alley Pizza is sure to delight.

125 W. Sixth St. | Newton | (316) 804-4924



ten.

AUNT NETTERS

Cupcakes and burgers? We live at Aunt Netters now. Locals suggest trying the lemon cupcake, but if you aren't sold on cake, try a cinnamon roll or the peach pecan pie crumble—maybe all three. We wouldn't blame you. Everything is delicious. If you're looking for breakfast, Aunt Netters is the spot for biscuits and gravy or a breakfast quesadilla. Lunchtime means burger time. Take our word for it; they are a Kansas favorite for a reason.

336 Elmore St. | Lecompton
(785) 503-6004



eleven.



←

twelve.

SPEEDWAY PIZZA

Russell and Sandy Graves know a good piece of pizza. They've owned Speedway Pizza since 2007, when they opened it next to the Cherokee Strip Campground and RV Park in Arkansas City. Named with racing themes, pizzas from Speedway are made with "the very best ingredients that money can buy," according to the couple. It's a mom-and-pop pizza joint with a loyal customer base and cheesy slices—a must-stop if you're in Arkansas City.

6916 306th Lane
Arkansas City
(620) 442-1118

13



thirteen.

SUBS-N-SUCH

Walking into Subs-N-Such is like walking into a family. Owners Darrin and Paula Frey consider each customer part of their chosen family (and you might even get service from any number of their real family). Pop in for a sub on your way to a K-State football game. Having trouble picking what you want on your sandwich? Get a Kitchen Sink. It has it all. Or opt for something from the "N Such" part of the menu—soups, salads or a chilidadog.

1816 Clafin Rd. | Manhattan
(785) 537-2411



fifteen.

HHB BBQ

Downtown Topeka workers quick-stepping their way to the office and visitors on their way to tour the Capitol are often greeted with the aroma of barbecue wafting from the huge smoker set up behind HHB BBQ.

Owner Eddie Moege says this is the smell of his city. Make no mistake, the meat he smokes is Topeka barbecue. "Not Kansas City style. Not Memphis style. My style," says Moege. "Everything is made on the smoker and 100 percent homemade, even the sides. We make it all here every day."

Originally opened in August 2012, the restaurant suffered a devastating early-morning fire in January 2015 that nearly put it out of business.

By Linda Ditch

"We weren't sure what was going to happen," Moege remembers. "But our customers and the downtown got behind us."

In retrospect, the fire turned out to be a blessing. It resulted in a larger restaurant with more seating. But even now, it isn't unusual for the lunchtime line to reach from the back all the way to the front door. So the HHB staff tries to serve its quality meats at a fast-food pace. "Walk-through BBQ" is what Moege calls it.

"Even when the line is backed up to the door, you're not more than five minutes away from getting your food," he promises.

906 S. Kansas Ave. | Topeka
(785) 246-6416

EDDIE MOEGE'S HHB BBQ TOP FIVE

- one. ribs**
Rubbed with his special spice mixture and then lightly coated with the HHB BBQ sauce. Served every night for dinner and for lunch on Fridays.
- two. brisket**
Coated with his own spice rub mixture and smoked for 14 hours.
- three. chicken**
Leg quarters served for dinner every evening and lunch on Wednesdays.
- four. wings**
Offered as a dinner appetizer, the HHB wings are smoked and served with hot or barbecue sauce on the side.
- five. pulled pork nachos**
Tortilla chips are loaded with smoky pulled pork and whatever toppings you like. Most people put barbecue sauce on top, but salsa is also available.

fourteen.
SADDLEROCK CAFÉ

Marsha and Mattea of Saddlerock Café in Council Grove are known for their breads. To put the size of their operation in perspective, some weeks they go through 400 pounds of flour. But beyond bread, Saddlerock Café serves quality home cooking such as hamburgers, chicken-fried steak smothered in gravy, and a breakfast menu filled with pancakes and meaty omelets. Saddlerock Café is the "rock" of the community. It's the place folks go each morning to catch up—some even eat most of their meals at Saddlerock. If you're looking for a full stomach and a warm heart, give Saddlerock Café a try.

15 S. Sixth St. | Council Grove | (620) 767-6411



sixteen.
MUSTARD SEED

June 2018 is the 14th anniversary of Mustard Seed's opening. The Buhler favorite serves desserts made from scratch and caters to the desires of the customers. If a regular asks for something special, Cindy, Laura and Karla are ready to tackle the challenge. In addition to making stellar sandwiches and serving phenomenal coffee, Mustard Seed supports the arts, in part by hosting Bits and Bobs, an annual steampunk art exhibit and reception.

214 N. Main St. | Buhler | (620) 543-2200



PHOTOGRAPHS (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) Paisley Howerton (2), David Mayes, Nick Krug (2), Kristen Garlow Piper, Jan Trosvell



seventeen.



nineteen.

LITTLE APPLE BREWING COMPANY

Century-old wood salvaged from a Kansas schoolhouse adds to the “gentrified western” ambiance of the Little Apple Brewing Company. That’s how Russ Loub describes his restaurant, nestled in a bustling shopping center on the west side of Manhattan.

“We wanted something saloonish-looking,” he says. “Something with an age that looks like it’s been around for a while.”

Even without its reclaimed wood floor, the Little Apple Brewing Company can tout historical milestones. For 22 years, it has served what many Kansans consider to be the staples of a local dining experience: beer and beef.

But Russ and his wife, Kelly, who co-own the place their patrons call LABco, have maintained certain traditions and standards to customize their restaurant’s appeal. Mounted steer skulls, a wall of mugs and other relics reminiscent of the Midwest surround a glass area that houses LABco’s manual brewery. The smell of hops regularly wafts through the restaurant.

“We can almost say Little Apple Brewing has the oldest brewing system in the state of Kansas,” Kelly says.

The brewers use gravity filtration to make LABco’s beers. This system allows sediments left in fresh beer time to sink. While they acknowledge that technology has outpaced their

By Kimetris Baltrip

rudimentary process, the Loub’s insist on making their hand-crafted beers in the LABco tradition.

“It gives the beer a very mouthy feel; it has a texture to it,” Russ says. “It’s something our customers appreciate.”

To accompany the beer, LABco is proud to serve Certified Angus Beef and holds the distinction as the state’s only restaurant licensed to serve it.

“We reflect the region with Kansas being a big beef-producing state,” Kelly says. “We work with local producers.”

LABco’s steaks are popular, but hamburgers are the restaurant’s top sellers.

“We were selling so many that some years back, we approached our producer ... We wanted him to come up with a better burger,” Russ says.

A Johnson & Wales-educated chef with training in French restaurants, Russ started “the white menu,” which is a seasonal menu that features elements of cuisines from around the world based on what’s available. Russ says the specialty menu on white paper has become his daily “obsession ... to be different, be unique and do something no one else is doing in town.”

1110 Westloop Pl. | Manhattan
(785) 539-5500

DO-B’S

In the heart of cattle country and with strong connections to the meatpacking and cattle industry, Emporia should be a natural fit for a diner with the very best of beef dishes. And that is exactly what Do-B’s does with its line of customized burgers ranging from the no-frills option to the “OMG”—a pile of taste loaded with pastrami, grilled onions with teriyaki glaze, pepperjack cheese and creole mustard. Then there are the Philly cheesesteaks starring sirloin beef combinations in hoagies dripping with sauce and cheese.

But this is where Do-B’s gets interesting. Those cheesesteaks also come in pork and chicken options, and beyond this, the menu branches out into all sorts of specialties that go well beyond standard beef-country chow. The house-made remoulade sauce and the in-house creole mustard, for example, are featured in a range of dishes, including the blackened catfish po-boy and the chicken cordon blue. Salads don’t shy away from

By Nathan Pettengill

featuring as the main dish, with options such as the “The Buff Chick,” that features mixed greens, onions, bell peppers, blue cheese crumbles, mushrooms and grilled chicken sautéed in the house wing sauce.

Long-term Emporians and old-time ESU Hornets will recognize the diner’s eastside location as the former home of a fast-food chain. The building still has the drive-thru window box, and if you stand in the parking lot, you can easily match the diner’s silhouette to the corporate box it used to be. But that, really, is the charm of Do-B’s—because what it looks like from the street and any expectations you might have of it from the outside begin to fall away once you come up to the counter where baked goods are sold with hand-lettered tags. And those preconceptions are fully dropped once you take your first bite of a Do-B’s dish.

704 E. 12th Ave. | Emporia
(620) 342-7294



PHOTOGRAPHS (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) David Mayes (2), Dave Leiker (3), Katherine Bach, Bill Stephens

eighteen.

TRAILS CAFÉ

Located on the north end of one of Holton’s main drags, the Trails Café has been a fixture of the town since the 1960s and continues to host a good portion of Holton on any given lunch or dinner. It serves up traditional country cooking with catfish, hamburger and fried chicken being the three most popular dishes. Kansas-style bierocks are also on the menu. Look for the large sign and a parking lot of trucks with local Jackson County stickers on their license plates. The locals know.

601 Arizona Ave. | Holton | (785) 364-2786



twenty.

GENOVA’S ITALIAN RESTAURANT

Genova’s Italian Restaurant in Newton opened in 2015 and is homemade Italian at its finest. Offering traditional Italian dishes in large portions, Genova’s is worth a trip to Newton. Come hungry! The garlic rolls get rave reviews, and owner Rosie treats everyone like family. It’s a perfect spot for a celebration or family event, and you’re guaranteed a full stomach (and probably a to-go box). **KM**

1021 Washington Rd. #300 | Newton | (316) 587-8099

