



Dining in Pittsburgh: From elegant to jazzy

By Marcia Duncan Lowry

*Here's a listing of restaurants to
whet your appetite*

An army marches on its stomach," stated Napoleon. After many years in the library profession, I am inclined to believe this is equally true of librarians attending conferences. Given the significance of the topic of food, we've saved the best till last. This final article in the ACRL 7th National Conference information series discusses Pittsburgh's eating establishments. Whether you are a gourmet, a gourmand, or just plain hungry, the following list will provide some assistance. Each year *Pittsburgh Magazine* conducts a reader's poll of the best restaurants in a variety of categories. The winners are noted in this article to aid your decision-making. Restaurant pricing, for the budget-conscious, is indicated by a dollar sign symbol following the name of the restaurant (see the key on the following page).

Dining in Pittsburgh is best described in the context of districts and neighborhoods (see the February issue of *C&RL News* for a description of these). With time of the essence, busy conference attendees will be interested primarily in what is available closest to the Convention Center for breakfasts and lunches. All of the designated conference hotels have restaurants which can meet these needs. It is worth re-

peating, however, that Pittsburgh has a very compact downtown, encompassing basically ten city blocks. Many places are within easy striking distance for lunch. Evening meals can afford a more leisurely pace, and you may wish to consider destinations a bit farther out.

Downtown and The Strip

The Strip, an easy ten-minute walk from the Convention Center, has a lineup of quick-bite spots. DeLuca's (\$), voted "Best Breakfast," is full of local color; the Italian Oven (\$), a local chain restaurant which has claimed its ranking among the nationals, earns votes for best pizza in town. Consider Roland's Seafood Grill (\$\$\$) if a bucket of little neck clams and a choice of 18 microbrewery and import beers on tap sounds appealing.

There may not be a great deal which "defines" Pittsburgh cuisine, but if you want to experience a bona fide local tradition, drop in at Primanti Brothers (\$) for lunch in the Strip District or on Cherry Way downtown. When you order a sandwich accompanied with slaw and fries, don't be surprised to find your side dishes piled on *top* of your sandwich. It's just a 'Burgh thing! (French fries also find their way to the top of grilled chicken or steak salads in Pittsburgh.)

All dining spots downtown are approximately 15-minute walks from the Convention Center. The Original Oyster House (\$) in Mar-

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The Grand Concourse Restaurant is an elegant eatery in a transformed 1880s train station.

ket Square is a famous landmark since 1870 and is noted for oysters, fish boat platters, and Maryland crab cakes. This is a popular lunch spot. Across the Square, Jakes Above the Square Restaurant (\$\$\$\$) is open for lunch and dinner and features a sophisticated and comfortable decor as the background for contemporary American and Northern Italian fare judged by *Pittsburgh Magazine* as “consistently superlative.” Two other notable spots downtown for regional Italian dining are Piccolo Piccolo (\$\$\$) on Wood Street and Juno Trattoria (\$\$\$) in One Oxford Center.

Where’s the beef? Downtown has two answers for that question. Voted as “Best in the City” by *Pittsburgh Magazine* readers are Ruth’s Chris Steak House (\$\$\$\$) located in PPG Place and Morton’s of Chicago (\$\$\$\$) in the CNG Tower. Bring a hearty appetite to either of these establishments. The sophisticated and stylish Carlton (\$) restaurant is located in the heart of downtown in the Mellon Bank Center. Expect very good grilled seafood and a variety of prime meats on this American menu, voted one of the top in the city.

Adding variety to your conference grazing, downtown provides two options on Sixth Street near Heinz Hall: Southwest Bistro (\$\$) and Suzies (\$\$). Southwest Bistro offers, yes, the obvious cuisine but look for traces of the chef’s classical French training in unusual combinations of ingredients and preparations. Suzie’s, voted one of the top three “best” in the Middle Eastern/Greek category, serves homemade Greek dishes, pastries, and breads.

Oakland and Shadyside

East of downtown, Oakland and Shadyside can be reached in about 15 minutes by cab. Oakland, home to Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh, is also home to some very fine restaurants. Craig Street has a trio to tantalize palates. Ali Baba (\$\$) is a longtime favorite and maintains its standing as one of the best in Middle Eastern dining in the city, as well as one of the best vegetarian restaurants. Star of India (\$\$) is also worth noting and holds the title of “Best Indian.” Cafe Azure (\$\$\$) describes itself as a bistro serving a provincial French, American regional, and nouvelle menu. Live jazz is offered on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Jazz is also on the evening bill of fare at the Balcony (\$\$\$) in Shadyside, a busy favorite for lunch or dinner that will not disappoint you with its offerings of creative pasta dishes, good seafood, and legendary hot fudge sundaes. It serves a wonderful jazz brunch on Sundays, as well.

Variety being the spice of life, you can find both at the Thai Palace (\$\$) in Shadyside. Voted “Best of Other Asian Cuisines,” variety is met with nearly 100 items on the menu and spice is provided by dishes calibrated on a heat scale of one to ten.

Another Shadyside winner is Baum Vivant (\$\$\$\$). In an intimate atmosphere you can enjoy fine European dining featuring Portuguese

Key

Based on the price of a three-course meal for one person:

\$ less than \$10

\$\$ \$10-\$20

\$\$\$ \$20-\$30

\$\$\$\$ more than \$30

specialties. Nearby on Baum Boulevard is Cafe Sam (\$\$\$), a favorite with locals offering a varied menu of French, Italian, and California selections.

South Side and Mt. Washington

Although it is sometimes said that the elevation of a restaurant is inversely related to the quality of its food, not so when dining on the heights of Mt. Washington on the South Side. Expect a cab ride of about 20 minutes, depending on traffic, to these destinations. Three restaurants deserve serious consideration for outstanding food and vistas of Pittsburgh. All three received top votes for "Most Romantic" restaurants. President Clinton and Prime Minister John Major selected the Tin Angel (\$\$\$\$) for their dinner meeting last year. Its continental menu includes steak dishes and lobster. Christopher's (\$\$\$\$) continental cuisine and Le Mont's (\$\$\$\$) contemporary American cuisine are both accompanied by the tinkling of ivories. Reservations are a must at all three.

Down from the heights, however, you will find two of the top three "Best Overall" restaurants in the 'Burgh. Cafe Allegro (\$\$\$\$), located just off Carson Street on 21st Street, is the top winner. The cafe designs its culinary creations from French/Italian Mediterranean coastal traditions and prides itself on using only the seasonally freshest ingredients. It is justly famous for its desserts.

Second place accolades go to the Grand Concourse (\$\$\$) at Station Square. Elegant is the only way to describe dining in this transformed and restored train station of the 1800s. The fresh fish specialties, voted some of the best in Pittsburgh, are well prepared as are the steak and lamb. Come early and enjoy drinks and the raw bar in the attached Gandy Dancer Saloon. The Grand Concourse was also voted the "Best Sunday Brunch."

North Side

For a complete change of venue, swing across the Allegheny River into the North Side. Allow a 15-minute cab ride in good traffic. An authentic German beer hall awaits you in Pittsburgh's old Deutchtown. The Penn Brewery (\$\$) on Troy Hill Road is the first "tied house" (brewery-owned restaurant) in Pennsylvania since Prohibition. Enjoy authentic German food and over eleven varieties of German beer brewed on site conforming to Germany's beer purity law of 1516. Live musical entertain-

ment rings throughout the hall Tuesday through Saturday evenings.

And the list goes on

Although it is impossible to provide a complete review of all the restaurant offerings, the following list is a further gastronomic sampling. An asterisk (*) indicates inclusion on the "Best of . . ." listing. Bon appetit!

Downtown and The Strip

Mullaney's Harp and Fiddle, *Schwartz's Bagels, *Sammy's Famous Corned Beef, *Richest Restaurant Deli, Dingbats, The Common Plea, Au Bon Pain, Max and Erma's.

Oakland and Shadyside

*Mad Mex, *Schwartz's Bagels, *Pasta Piatta, Sushi Too, *Hot Licks, *Pittsburgh Deli Company, Max and Erma's, The Carnegie Museum Cafe.

South Side and Mt. Washington

The Cliffside, Grandview Saloon, 1889 Cafe, *La Pommier, *Mallorca, The Shops at Station Square: *Kiku's, Houlihan's, *Bobby Rubino's, Tequila Junction.

North Side

Clark Bar and Grill, James Street New Orleans Specialties, *Max's Allegheny Tavern, Cerulean Bistro. ■

Have dinner with a local librarian

Meet new friends as you sample the cuisine at one of Pittsburgh's many interesting restaurants. Pittsburgh-area librarians will join you for dinner on Wednesday, March 30, to welcome you to their city. Sign up at the Hospitality Desk in the David Lawrence Convention Center when you come over to pick up your registration packet. Sign-up is on a first-come, first-served basis.

Also available at the Hospitality Desk will be a restaurant guide and reservation service. Pittsburgh Convention and Visitor's Bureau staff will be on hand to answer your questions or guide you in the right direction.

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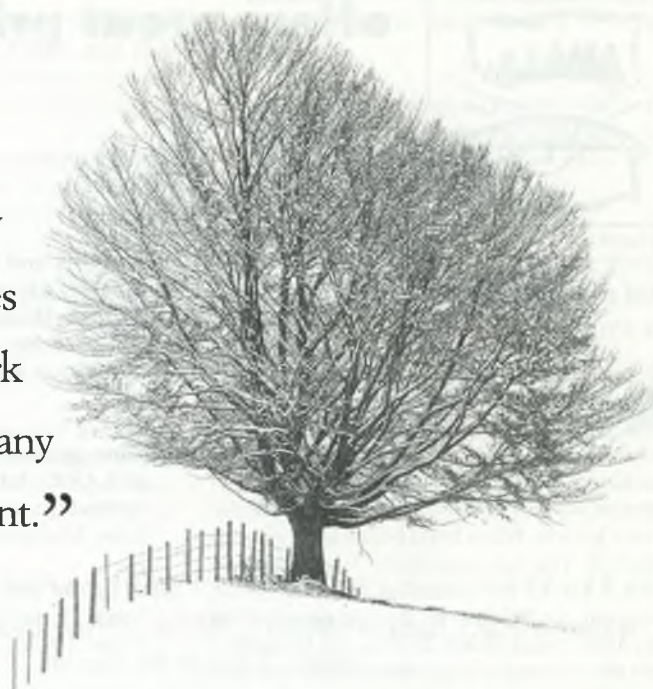
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