

Best of Business: Kansas City 2008



Best Barbecue

Can't say we need to rethink our ever so consistent choices in this category because they're all so darned good. But the winners look remarkably the same as last year. The ultimate **Gold** goes to **Fiorella's Jack Stack Barbecue** for the ninth year in a row. Those are some ribs – and onion rings. And sandwiches. And beans. Closer than a pig's snout is **Oklahoma Joe's** with the **Silver**, no doubt for its pulled pork and funky atmosphere and truly great sauce. The **Bronze** goes to **Gates Bar-B-Q**, a tribute to both longevity and truly wonderful meat.

Best Business Breakfast

A good breakfast is a classic and the top two contenders slugged it out last year in the same order. First for the **Gold** again is **Frst Watch**—solid fare, big tables, endless pots of coffee you pour for yourself. **The Classic Cup Cafe** smoothes the way for the **Silver**—some say this is the breakfast place at which to be seen. Try their pancakes. The **Bronze** goes to the **blue bird bisto** where the biscuits and bison gravy entice the hearty eater and the organic foods and ex-cellent coffee are better than homemade.

Best Business Lunch

Taking the **Gold** again is **The Capital Grille** on the Plaza which adds another fil-lip—hearty, manly food including appetizers that can serve for meals themselves. **J. Alexander** is new on the list for the **Silver**, its Overland Park location (of 33) long a favorite with business folks whether they want just a loaded baked potato or perfectly executed fish dish. **Hereford House's** six locations devour the **Bronze**, soothing wood interiors and varied menus working their magic on business deals.

Best Business Dinner

Apparently the same elements work for this category as well. See the first placewinner above for the second **Gold The Capital Grille** captures this year. At dinner perhaps, you can add a famous stolid oley or wine from its comprehensive list. **The Plaza III** takes the **Silver**, perhaps for its understated steak house-iness and wonderful service in one of the venerable steak landmarks in town. The **Bronze** stays on the Plaza but walks a bit north over to **McCormick & Schmick's** where a hugely extensive fresh fish menu pleases.

Best Caterer

When you're hosting an event or a fun party, the right caterer can make a giant difference. Lon Lane's **Inspired Occasions of The Catering Company** again devours the **Gold** for its special attention to every client and inventive foods elegantly displayed. For when finger licking is more appropriate, the **Silver** is awarded to **Fiorella's Jack Stack Barbecue**. And new in the winners' circle for the **Bronze** this year is the ever expanding **Kansas City Catering Company**, celebrating its 25th anniversary due to its flexibility, creativity, and great people.

Best Dessert/Presentation

We find soothing repetition from 2007 in all three places. **McCormick & Schmick's** slurps up the **Gold**, for its renowned chocolate bag or key lime pie. Did you miss National Cheesecake Day on July 30th? Make up for it at two **Cheesecake Factory** locations to see why readers chose it for the **Silver**. The iconic **Peppercorn Duck Club** demonstrates the power of chocolate for the **Bronze**, its famous dessert bar full of wondrous delicacies.

Best Ethnic Restaurant

Italian to many of us is so mainstream, it's difficult to envision it in this category, but **Garozzo's Ristorante** is the choice of our readers for the **Gold** award. Perhaps it's because that's "where chicken spiedini began!" **Piropos** in Briarcliff wins **Silver** accolades for its Argentinean approach and spices on charbroiled meats and fish. Returning to our list for the **Bronze** is **The Blue Koi**. The two noodle and dumpling shops dish up innovative Chinese food like "ants on a tree" or "fire bird."

Best Outdoor Dining

Ingram's eaters do like to dine al fresco. And they never tire of voting the **Gold** to **The Classic Cup Cafe** on the Plaza. Whether you prefer the sidewalk strip or more enclosed and private back door patio, this European style bistro is sure to please. Also on the Plaza and usually packed on balmy days is **Baja 600** where southwest and Mexican specialties abound for the **Silver**. Their 40 tequilas don't hurt either. Moving a bit south to Brookside, long time favorite **Joe d's Winebar—Café, and Patio** is a long sitting favorite, winning the **Bronze** this year.

Best Place to eat with a Group

Forced to eat in one of those long tables where the conversation is always more interesting at the other end? Our readers award **Hibachi Japanese Steak House** the **Gold** because of the sheer entertainment that knife wielding chefs provide. For more carbs, your **Silver** choice, **Buca di Beppo**, in a downstairs Plaza location offers Italian "family style" dining for families of two or more. Our **Bronze** winner is **The Melting Pot** where groups can dip meats, fruits, veggies into cheese, oil, or chocolate.

Best Place to Take Out-of-Town Guests

So company's here and you want them to leave – leave soon, but happy. Our readers recommend **Fiorella's Jack Stack Barbecue** for a **Golden** experience. What could be better than the best KC barbecue? For more elegance and a signature steak in mellow surroundings, the **Silver** goes to the **Plaza III**. For a more homey experience, and proving great fried chicken is available in the Midwest, our readers return to **Stroud's** for the **Bronze**, their newest location in Fairway bringing back fans.

Most Romantic Restaurant

Nothing says there's no one else but you, darling, better than the airy elegance of **The American Restaurant** in Crown Center. Inventive food and impeccable service are to be expected there – and for the **Gold** prize here, you have to have it all. **The Raphael Restaurant** in the Plaza is recognized for the **Silver** this year, where its cozy booths and dim lights nearly shout, "I'm yours for the taking." **Skies** enters the romantic milieu this year for the **Bronze**, where you have a chance to see Kansas City at its most beatific from atop the Hyatt Regency if you get weary of gazing at your beloved's eyes.

Best Seafood

The **Bristol Seafood Grill** moved up this year two places to the **Gold**, perhaps because its additional location in the Power and Light district allowed more Kansas Citians to taste its fresh seafood. That means that someone had to move to the **Silver**, and yes, it's **McCormick & Schmick's**, still a winner for seafood lovers in Kansas City. **Bonefish Grill**, with locations in both Leawood and North Kansas City, swims to the **Bronze**, its reasonable prices and fresh fish a great combo.

Best Steak

The sizzling steak competition continues in a city where the title of best steak means a whole lot. Three longtime favorites dominate the voting this year. The **Plaza III** again wins the coveted **Gold** prize, juicy, tender, and perfect being its key words. The **Hereford House**, with its multiple locations, moves in for **Silver**, followed by **The Capital Grille**, which breaks its tie from last year to graze alone for the **Bronze**. Split the rib-eye there, it's oh-my-gosh delicious.

Best Wine List

The perennial and eternal favorite, **JJ's**, succeeds again for the **Gold** due to our readers' recognition that any place offering thousands of different wines (from \$7 a glass to \$15,000 a bottle). New on our list, the **Silver** winner, **JP Wine and Coffee Bar** in the Crossroads where you won't feel like you're in good ol' KC for a minute except for the staff's friendliness. Brookside's **Joe d's Winebar—Cafe and Patio** picks up the **Bronze** for its 50 wines by the glass and 200 available bottles which consistently earn it.

Best New Restaurant (locally-owned)

We love this category because it highlights the successful risk-takers in a high mortality industry in a pretty conservativetown. **Restaurant Michael Smith** in the Crossroads is our **Gold** winner, due in no small part to his emphasis on fresh, perfect, and flexible. For all of that he's already winning rave reviews. Newer still for our **Silver** award is **Trezo Vino Wine Bistro** out south on 115th Street where flights of wine and Michael Peterson's unusual dishes satisfy picky suburbanites. And far to the north in Smithville, executive chef-owner Jonathon Justus draws people from throughout the Kansas City area for his inventive fare set in his family's original drugstore, **Justus Drugstore** a restaurant. He wins the **Bronze**, to the applause of adventuresome foodies everywhere.

Best New Restaurant (National chain)

No place has gotten more hype, both paid for and not, than our new entertainment center, the Power & Light District. So we guess it's only fitting that this category goes there, and stays there. First on the block for the **Gold** is **Vinino**, whose wines start at \$5.50 a glass and meals range from pizza and calzones to full Italian dishes. **Gordon Biersch**, a brewery restaurant, now operates in 17 states and Taiwan, serves up home brews and home made better-than-good bar-style food, grabbing the **Silver** prize. With nearly 20 restaurants to their name but only one other similar to the Power & Light District locale, **Maker's Mark Bourbon House and Lounge** serves up serious drinks and hearty food, earning it this year's **Bronze** honor.

Best Service

Perfect service requires commitment, the right attitude, and skill born usually of excellent training and experience. This year's winners clearly reflect that. **The Capital Grille** captures the **Gold** prize of this category important to voters. High atop Crown Center, **The American Restaurant** maintains its stellar reputation and pulls in this year's **SSiillvveerr** award. Be sure to ask for Robert, but the entire staff is wonderful. Out in Johnson County, **J. Alexander's** vivacious and pleasant multiple servers are trained well to anticipate your needs.

Best Overall Restaurant

For its fifth award this year, **The Capital Grille** sizzles for the **Gold**. This is one chain that knows how to do it right. The **Silver** slides to **Plaza III**, a veritable tradition for Kansas City steak. And **J. Gilbert's Wood Fired Steaks and Seafood**, part of a long-standing tradition but new on our list, prevails for **Bronze**.

Best Restaurant (Clay & Platte counties)

Up north, in "God's country," as residents like to repeat (waaay too often), the **Gold** goes to **Piropos** whose new Briarcliff location has been welcomed with open arms. Back in Parkville, **Café des Amis** soars for **Silver**, with its treetop location patio, cozy interior and scrumptious French food.

Best Restaurant (Johnson & Wyandotte Counties)

Drive several hundred blocks to the south is the **Bristol Seafood Grill** on 119th Street, which has clasped the **Gold** award. Did you know there are even two Bristols in St. Louis in case you need a seafood fix there as well? Or try the new **Silvered Trezo Vino** for lunch, dinner, or later.

Best Restaurant (Jackson County)

In the heart of urban KC, you have many resources and our discerning readers have selected **The Capital Grille** for the **Gold**, stalwart **Plaza III** for the **Silver**, and the newer **Avenues Bistro** in Brookside for the **Bronze**. For lunch here, try the ribeye steak panini or croquet monsieur but always get the pommefrites. You can't go wrong at any of the three.

Best Restaurant (Missouri Suburban)

If you're in eastern Kansas City, the best place to go for the **Gold** is the **Marina Grog & Galley** where since 1992, diners have enjoyed different dining areas, including a fabulous outdoor deck overlooking Lake Lotawana. The food, service, and lake views leave nothing for you to want.

Best Restaurant (Kansas Suburban)

Head west to Lawrence where **Pacha—mama's** still reigns supreme for the **Gold**. When its creekside location opened in 1996, local gourmets were thrilled, and the move two years ago to downtown has only expanded the clientele and reputation.