



**A**round this time, on and off for the past several years, *Eugene Weekly* has asked readers and community members to say what they dream of for Eugene. (Truthfully, we actually ask about Springfield and Lane County, too, but let's face it, "I dream of Eugene" kind of rhymes.) This year, we decided to focus on the little things that we already love about this town. Here are our staff picks as well as some thoughts from community members. Dream on. — *Camilla Mortensen*

PHOTO: TODD COOPER

**BEST CHEF**

Writing about food is like dancing about architecture, and words fall especially short when discussing **Chef Tiffany Norton, head chef at Party Downtown** (64 W. 8th Alley, Eugene; 541-345-8228). A culinary master of flavors that are at once exotic and familiar, down-homey and out-of-this-world, Norton has elevated her craft to a level of sophistication that is truly rare. "Texture balance and flavor balance," she says when asked about her primary focus when creating new dishes. "Just trying to find the balance between sugar, acid, salt, the whole shebang. Depth. I like creating new things or trying new things," she adds. Norton, who co-owns Party Downtown with her husband Mark Kosmicki (also a chef), describes her style of cuisine as Northwestern through a Southern perspective, though influences from around the world gather in her dishes, which routinely feature food sourced from the bountiful farms of Willamette Valley. And yet, no amount of fancy language does justice to the exquisite joy of a meal at Party Downtown — having eaten and written about food from Seattle to Eugene, I can say without bombast that not only is Norton the best chef in Eugene, she's one of the best in the broader Northwest, and perhaps even the entire West Coast. She's a treasure. — *Rick Levin*



PHOTO: TODD COOPER

**BEST CHINESE RESTAURANT IN A GAS STATION (AND THE COFFEE BOX IS GOOD TOO)**

I suspect only Creswellians or hungry people pulling off the freeway have had the chance to experience **China Wok** near I-5 in Creswell. Full disclosure: I used to live just outside Creswell and last time I was in to pick up dinner they remembered my own order better than I did, gently pointing out that I didn't want ma po tofu, which also contains pork, but kung pao tofu, which is vegetarian.

The first time a friend took me there for dinner, I was a little surprised that we were heading into a restaurant that had very clearly been a gas station in its recent past. But the tofu dishes made me very happy. A quick scan of online food reviews show I'm not the only one who goes, "Umm, was this a gas station?" Followed by, "Hey, wait, this is good!" Personal favorite Yelp and Google review comments include, "Although located in an old gas station, China Wok will not let you down" and "Surprisingly good food. Sketch place. Great for take out!!! It's an old gas station."

Chinese food aficionados might label China Wok as "Chinese-American food" and, indeed, if you read the Huff Po's food blog on "Who Was General Tso and Why Are We Eating His Chicken?" you will learn that General Tso's chicken is a dish that was created in the 1950s by the Hunanese chef Peng Chang-kuei and altered to suit American taste buds. The vegetarian version of General Tso's from Creswell suits my tofu-oriented Danish-American taste buds just right, especially on a night where I'm tired and the only thing that sounds good is curling up on the sofa and eating hot food I didn't cook myself. And if I do need to wake up, Hot Shots Coffee, located in the kiosk between what used to be the gas station pumps in the China Wok parking lot, is good, inexpensive and always has treats and compliments for my rambunctious canines.

China Wok is at 375 E. Oregon Avenue, Creswell; 541-895-9788. — *Camilla Mortensen*

**BEST DAIRY-FREE CUPCAKE**

Cupcakes are the perfect dessert. They're the ideal size and you don't have to share them with anyone because, let's face it, cutting one in half is a padded pain in the ass. So for everyone who loves wonderful, individual sized mini-cakes, but who also lacks the ability to digest milk, we recommend you try the variety of egg- and/or dairy-free cupcakes at **Sweet Life** (755 Monroe Street, Eugene; 541-683-5676). There's a reason Sweet Life wins in our Best of Eugene voters' poll year after year. Personally, I love the strawberry lemonade dairy-free cupcake with buttercream frosting, and the icing is sparkly — yay glitter! Seriously though, cupcakes make people happy, so these are perfect for your lactose intolerant/vegan friends. — *Corinne Boyer*