

BEST BURGER & BEST CLAM CHOWDER

The Depot

Seaview,
Washington

BEST BURGER Runner-up:

Portway Tavern, Astoria
Honorable Mention:
Buoy Beer Co., Astoria

BEST CLAM CHOWDER Runner-up:

Buoy Beer Co., Astoria
Honorable Mention:
Dooger's Seafood & Grill,
Warrenton



PHOTO BY PATRICK WEBB

Nancy Gorshe and Michael Lalewicz are known for providing fantastic dining at The Depot in Seaview, Washington. This year they've won awards for serving the best clam chowder and burgers on the coast.

Gorshe, chef and manager respectively at The Depot, a well-established fine dining restaurant in a historic train station building in Seaview, Washington. The married couple has been running the place for 13 years, drawing

on considerable and varied experience from Portland, the East Coast and Lalewicz's native Detroit. Once again, they have been honored by readers with awards for Best Clam Chowder and Best Burger.



PHOTO BY LYNETTE RAE MCADAMS
The Depot Restaurant's Clam-shell Railroad Clams Chowder is made to order in a creamy broth, with whole wild Willapa Bay steamers and chopped Pacific razor clams.

Lalewicz sums up his chef's philosophy by saying, "Don't do things that other people are doing, and if you do them, do them

better." His menu offers 36 items, of which seven are desserts.

The chowder has nuance in abundance. It features chopped razor clams with garlic and leeks. It is cooked then allowed to cool, rather than sitting on a warmer. Potatoes are cooked separately. Fresh steamer clams in the shell are added in a timely manner, and the portion is heated when ordered. And there's no bacon or herbs; "It takes away from the clam flavor," Lalewicz says.

Midweek burger night is a hit. "I didn't set this place up to be a burger joint," says Lalewicz with a wry smile. "It's to give the locals something different."

During the school year, the Wednesday night menu shrinks to just one-dozen items. Burgers feature four options, top-quality beef,

buffalo, a Portabello mushroom or a fried oyster. And there are 14 toppings. Yes, 14. For the record, that's four cheeses — cheddar, blue, pepper jack or Swiss — plus lettuce, tomato, red onion, pickles, jalapeño, pineapple, avocado, sautéed mushrooms, bacon and even a fried egg.

Only a mathematician could figure out how many potential variations there are — so wait staff actually have customers fill out a check-off card, which the cooks follow scrupulously.

When asked, Lalewicz reveals that his favorite choice is everything — except pineapple, a fruit he likes, just not on a burger.

The Depot, located at 208 38th Place in Seaview, Washington, opens at 5 p.m. every night and closes when the last customer departs.

By PATRICK WEBB

Consistent quality is the key for co-owners Michael Lalewicz and Nancy

BEST LIVE THEATER

Astor Street Opry Company

Astoria, Oregon

Runner-up: Liberty Theater, Astoria

Honorable Mention: Coaster Theatre, Cannon Beach

By PATRICK WEBB

The Astor Street Opry Company exists to entertain.

It is interactive live theater. Its intentionally two-dimensional characters appear larger than life. And their emotional responses are exaggerated to the full.

The hit run started with "Shanghaied in Astoria," the summer melodrama complete with musical oleos (short acts) that attracts audiences totaling 2,500 during its 10-week run. An especially creative group of North Coast artists dreamed up the first show in 1985, then expanded on its success. Since its move from the old Finnish Market some

years ago, volunteer organizers have kept adding shows at the theatrical playhouse on Astoria's Bond Street.

The group produces two similar-style regulars, "Scrooged in Astoria," which tickles funny bones in a sort-of Dickensian way before Christmas, and a spring comedy called, "The Real Lewis and Clark Story or How Finns Discovered Astoria." (Disclaimer: The latter may not be entirely historically accurate.) Children's programs and other offerings, including experimental, original and more serious shows which change each year, round out a year-long season.

Markus Brown, the



SUBMITTED PHOTO COURTESY THE SHOP FOR GUYS AND DOLLS & STUDIO, OWNED BY ASHLEY MUNDEL

Brian Allen plays Krooke, left, and Neen Drage is Sneak in the Astor Street Opry Company's of "Shanghaied in Astoria."

group's marketing manager, is also chairman of the production committee. He's been involved since 2003 and delights in directing, acting and organizing.

"I am enjoying producing melodrama," he said. "It allows me to come way out of my box. You are constantly discovering things that makes the audience tick."

There are no apologies for a formula that works.

"It's vaudevillian melodrama — audience-interactive fun where the are characters larger than life, their emotions are huge, and the actors exploit the physicality of the moment," Brown said. "It makes it all enormously accessible to everyone."

Brown notes that the Lewis and Clark show is an excellent example of ASOC at its best. "It's not meant to be serious," he said. "We



SUBMITTED PHOTO

This Astor Street Opry Company's "The Real Story of Lewis and Clark" musical mixes Scandinavian tropes with the lore of Lewis and Clark.

have had Finns in the audience who were laughing the loudest. There is something that appealed to their inner child."

As ASOC plans productions for another year, Brown and other behind-the-scenes leaders are examining

options. "We are looking to take risks, to evolve, to make sure we are not stale."

The ASOC Playhouse is at 129 W. Bond St. in Astoria. Buy tickets at 403-325-6104, and learn more at astorstreetycompany.com