

## BEST BURGER, BEST CHEF, BEST CLAM CHOWDER, BEST FINE DINING



Colin Murphey

Michael Lalewicz sets a table in the dining room of The Depot Restaurant in Seaview, Wash.

# THE DEPOT

## SEAVIEW, WASH.

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ

**BEST BURGER****Runner-up:** Portway Tavern, Astoria**Honorable mention:** Dairy Maid, Warrenton**BEST CHEF****Runner-up:** Dan Brownson, Carruthers**Honorable mention:** Andrew Catalano, Street 14 Cafe**BEST CLAM CHOWDER****Runner-up:** Buoy Beer Company, Astoria**Honorable mention:** Silver Salmon Grille, Astoria**BEST FINE DINING****Runner-up:** Carruthers, Astoria**Honorable mention:** T. Paul's Supper Club, Astoria

This isn't the first time the popular Seaview restaurant on the Long Beach Peninsula has won first place Readers' Choice awards for Best Burger, Best Clam Chowder, Best Chef and Best Fine Dining.

"We're honored," said Nancy Gorshe, manager and proprietor at The Depot. "At the same time," she added, laughing, "it makes us nervous every year."

Diners who have enjoyed the restaurant's regular offerings of rib eye steak or southern comfort pork — a slow braised pork shoulder that pairs sweet and savory and so delights one customer he has told executive chef Michael Lalewicz that it would be his choice for a last meal if he ended up on death row — see no reason for the nerves.

The restaurant, which opened 16 years ago, is housed in Seaview's historic train depot. Trains that passed through the depot

transported mail, passengers and thousands of sacks of oysters.

Gorshe and Lalewicz say they are lucky to have a fabulous staff, some of whom have been longtime employees. In the kitchen, sous chef Jamie Gisby has been with them for 12 years while junior chef Roger Moorley has been there for 10. Longtime server Don Porter earned a second-place mention in this year's Reader's Choice.

"We could not be doing this without our amazing team," Gorshe said.

Lalewicz and his kitchen change The Depot's menu twice a year, following the seasons and using fresh ingredients. Simplicity is often key.

Take that award-winning chowder, made with only a few ingredients and fresh oysters. Lalewicz decided not to include bacon, often a popular ingredient in clam chowders, opting instead to bring the flavors of the oysters to the forefront.

Every Wednesday from October through June, The Depot holds a burger night. Diners design their own custom burger from a list of possible ingredients that include options as basic as lettuce and tomato to less common toppings like avocado, pineapple and a friend egg.

Special wine dinners, where dishes are paired with specific wines, allow the restaurant to branch out in its offerings.

Lalewicz designed The Depot's first menus around foods he himself loved to eat — an approach that continues to guide the restaurant.

"I just wanted to make things that I liked, things that I craved and savored," he said.

## BEST LIVE THEATER, BEST MUSIC VENUE



Edward Stratton

Indie folk band Blind Pilot — including (from left) bassist Luke Ydstie, trumpeter and keyboardist Dave Jorgensen, lead singer Israel Nebeker, drummer Ryan Dobrowski, percussionist Ian Krist and multi-instrumentalist Kati Claborn — kicked off Liberty Theatre's Sunset Series in 2016, part of an effort to draw a younger audience to the historic venue.

## ASTORIA

By EDWARD STRATTON

**BEST LIVE THEATER****Runner-up:** Astor Street Opry Company, Astoria**Honorable mention:** Coaster Theatre Playhouse, Cannon Beach**BEST MUSIC VENUE****Runner-up:** Fort George Brewery, Astoria**Honorable mention:** Sou'wester Lodge, Seaview, Wash.

The Liberty Theatre, the region's oldest concert hall, has taken home the Readers' Choice awards for Best Live Theater and Best Music Venue — two awards it won last year.

The theater, originally opened in 1925 after a major fire destroyed much of downtown, was restored and reopened in 2006 by local nonprofit Liberty Restoration Inc. The theater has since become the region's preeminent venue for classical

music, highlighted by the Astoria Music Festival entering its 17th year.

Last year, the theater hosted more than 17,000 visitors, including 10,000 paying customers, 4,600 attending free community events and 2,500 visiting students. Executive Director Jennifer Crockett credits the theater's popularity to its responsiveness to patrons, adding new events and dropping others that have fallen out of favor.

"We don't want to get too comfortable," she said. "We always want to keep engaging with our patrons."

In 2016, Liberty Theatre began the Sunset Series, bringing in more modern rock and folk bands such as Blind Pilot in an effort to attract a younger audience, along with a partnership with Ohana Media Group to bring in tribute bands. The theater has also focused more on dance groups such as BodyVox and free family events to get more people in the door, Crockett said.

The theater has expanded its role in the annual FisherPoets Gathering, hosting

readings Feb. 22 and 23 this year. It will hold the Hollywood Awards Night, a live screening of the Academy Awards, Feb. 24. In May, the venue will host a Cinco De Mayo celebration in partnership with the Lower Columbia Hispanic Council featuring Mi Cultura ballet folkloric and regional mariachi bands.

The original restoration of the Liberty Theatre took seven years and \$6 million, focusing on the building itself. Liberty Restoration Inc. is now in the midst of a \$3.3 million modernization of its backstage, concessions and other support areas. Its first annual gala in November took in \$300,000.

Over the next couple of months, the theater will roll out new LED lighting in its iconic sign on Commercial Street, along with other improvements to the facade and box office, to show that it is making progress and spending the money people have given to improve the theater, Crockett said. "Basically, it's just visibility and experience."



Jennifer Crockett, executive director of the Liberty Theatre in Astoria.

## BEST COFFEE, BEST CUSTOMER SERVICE



Colin Murphey

Micha Cameron-Lattek, who co-owns Street 14 Cafe with his wife, Jennifer, mixes a coffee drink behind the counter.

# STREET 14 CAFE

## ASTORIA

By RYAN HUME

**BEST COFFEE****Runner-up:** The Rusty Cup, Astoria**Honorable mention:** 3 Cups Coffee House, Astoria**BEST CUSTOMER SERVICE****Runner-up:** The Rusty Cup, Astoria**Honorable mention:** The Depot Restaurant, Seaview, Wash.

Micha Cameron-Lattek, co-owner of Street 14 Café along with his partner Jennifer, has a pretty good idea of why his well-regarded coffee shop snagged another Readers' Choice award for Best Coffee, as well as additional kudos for Best Customer Service.

"Part of the reason we like working with Stumptown is the resources," Cameron-Lattek said. "We take advantage of all the training resources we can get."

The Cameron-Latteks have a longtime relationship with the award-winning Portland-based coffee roaster, going back to their days brewing cups of Joe in Berlin, Germany, before they transplanted to Astoria.

Case in point, upon a recent visit to Street 14 to congratulate them upon their Readers' Choice wins, two trainers from

Stumptown were out on the coast to percolate a discussion.

Cameron-Lattek is quick to point out the knowledgeable and affable nature of their staff. "We have had a pretty solid crew for over two years now," he said.

The main blend they use for espresso drinks is Stumptown's Hairbender, which is sourced from Indonesian, Latin American and East African beans. But, as Cameron-Lattek pointed out, there's much more to a coffee drink than just the grounds. "Ninety per cent of our drinks are milk-based," he said.

The cafe has forged relationships with local farmers and vendors for their menu, so milk from, say, the Bennett Family Farm in Tillamook can also be used for coffee drinks for a small additional fee. They also keep seasonal rotating house-drip coffee on hand.

Of course, part of great customer service in a small town is also being a great neighbor. Street 14 does this through multiple donations to local organizations as well as through hosting pop-up events.

Look for a one-night-only event on Feb. 15, when Street 14 will turn over their kitchen to Smoked Bones BBQ. March 1 will usher in another annual Ferry Street Friday, where there will be specials and sales at many 14th Street businesses.