

Best (and Worst) of Pittsburgh

Share

With two hard-earned championship titles, accolades from the White House and top honors on the Economist's "Most Livable City" list, 2009 is a respectable time to say you're from Pittsburgh. Celebrate with our expansive list of "Bests," chosen by our editors and from our online "Readers' Poll." You'll come across a London-style double-decker bus tour, a downtown spot to sample Jackie O's favorite dessert, an eco-friendly brewhouse, delicious dim sum, a newly re-opened art-deco-style theater and more. Read on to discover 120+ reasons Pittsburgh is the best place to call home right now.

COLLEEN HEAVENS, BILL MODOONO, MELISSA RAYWORTH AND JONATHAN WANDER

Food & Drink

Best Philly Cheesesteak (Outside Philly's City Limits): As all you displaced Philadelphians living in Pittsburgh know, you can't get a real Philly cheesesteak anywhere other than Philly. But Campus Deli's version is as close as you're going to get without heading 300 miles down the turnpike. The



ILLUSTRATION BY JACKIE
PARDO/ARTSCOUNSELINC.COM

sandwich is loaded with quality Boar's Head meat, melted American cheese and fried onions. The key ingredient is its fresh Italian roll, which the deli purchases from Pittsburgh's legendary BreadWorks. 400 Semple St., Oakland; 412/683-3200. - Colleen Heavens

Best Dessert Recommendation by a Vanity Fair Blogger:

When James Wolcott, the award-winning contributing editor for Vanity Fair, wrote rhapsodically about his visit to Pittsburgh in late June, he raved about his dinner at the Strip District's Eleven, saying, "For dessert fetishists, my sweet tooth highly recommends the Banana Crème Pie." The creation of pastry chef Ericka Idler, the pie is served with such delectable touches as dulce de leche mousse, caramel pastry cream and a topping of graham-cracker tuiles. 1150 Smallman St., Strip District; 412/201-5656, bigburrito.com/eleven. - Jonathan Wander

Best Place to Swing a 10-Pound Beer: Take advantage of one of the few places where dancing atop benches and drinking beer by the liter is completely acceptable. At Hofbräuhaus, you and your 350 soon-to-be best friends will swing your massive glass mugs from side to side as you sing along to songs played by the house band, all decked out in lederhosen. The beer-hall atmosphere, complete with long wooden tables and benches, is modeled after the original Hofbräuhaus in Munich, Germany. This month's special is the 1810 Prince Ludwig, a flavorful amber lager with a spicy hint of hops. 2705 South Water St., SouthSide Works, South Side; 412/224-2328, hofbrauhauspittsburgh.com. - C.H.

Best Slice of New York: Pizza Sola keeps it simple. Inspired by the stone-oven pizzerias of the five boroughs constituting New York City, the locally owned Sola begins with freshly tossed thin crusts and imported San Marzano tomato sauce and builds from there with endless topping combinations. Go for the ever-classic - and enormous - New York-style pie (sauce, mozzarella and romano). After all, it's not an NYC slice if it's not big enough to fold in half. 6004 Penn Circle, East Liberty, 412/363-7652; 1417 E. Carson St., South Side, 412/481-3888; 114 Atwood St., Oakland, 412/681-7652, pizzasola.com. - C.H.

Best "Green" Beer: Here's a new reason to drink beer - you're saving the planet. At East End Brewing Co., owner and brewer Scott Smith is going beyond the classic sustainability

plan, adding an eco-friendly touch to his microbrew business. Of course he buys local, reduces, reuses and recycles. But he's likely one of the few beer makers who go so far as to give their spent grain to a local dairy farm, where it is used as a high-protein feed supplement. Smith also sends his spent hops and trub (the mucky stuff left in the brew kettle after the liquid has been drained) to be composted at Homewood Community Garden. With only a kitchen-sized trash bag of waste every few weeks, this guy deserves a toast. 6923 Susquehanna St., Homewood; 412/537-2337, eastendbrewing.com. - C.H.

Best Hotcakes: On the corner of a quaint little street in Dormont, the Dor-Stop Restaurant is about as American as apple pie. And while we have yet to try the pie, we can guarantee that the light and fluffy breakfast hotcakes are irresistible. They're smothered in buttery and syrupy goodness and are available in 11 different flavors, including pumpkin, apple cinnamon, oatmeal-walnut and chocolate chip. With breakfast fare this good, it's no wonder Food Network star Guy Fieri featured the restaurant on the first season of "Diners, Drive-ins and Dives." 1430 Potomac Ave., Dormont; 412/561-9320, dor-stoprestaurant.com. - C.H.

Best Wintertime Taste of Summer: "Frozen" isn't something we tend to like around Pittsburgh in the winter - frozen roads, frozen windshields and frozen fingers to name a few. But Bruster's seasonal peppermint-stick ice cream is the frozen exception. Available throughout December, this holiday sweet starts with creamy homemade vanilla ice cream and adds a kiss of red and green peppermint flakes. It's festively tasty and perfectly sweet. brusters.com. - C.H.

Candy Shop

Best Retro Treats: Village Candy is a vintage-style shop offering nostalgic sweets. (Candy blocks shaped like Legos, anyone? Wax lips? Or how about some Lemonheads or candy lipsticks?) Of course the shop carries all the standard candies too, including gummies of every shape and 50 varieties of jellybeans. But wait - it gets better. This heaven-on-earth candy shop regularly offers free pop and chocolate tastings. How sweet it is! 344 Beaver St., Sewickley; 412/741-1490, villagecandy.net. - C.H.

Best Meatloaf: Kleiner Deutschmann restaurant serves up the full German experience, from bratwursts and potato pancakes to steins of ale and heirloom decor. One dish you can't miss is the German meatloaf. It's made with veal, pork and beef, and tinted with just the right amount of German-imported Maggi seasoning - a savory European spice mix.

Served with red cabbage and mashed potatoes and your choice of sautéed onions or mushroom gravy, it's comfort food you won't soon forget. 643 Pittsburgh St., Springdale; 724/274-5022, thekleinerdeutschmann.com. - C.H.

Best Quick Seafood Lunch: Penn Avenue Fish Co. brings a whole new type of fish market to the Strip District, adding deep-sea chic to the fish-slicing counters of this endearing eatery. Grab a seat for lunch and you're instantly transported to a seaside port town. Busy fishmongers and chalkboard menus are complimented by chill music and modern decor. And unless you go out and hook your own, you won't be able to find fresher fish. Try a classic fish sandwich made with battered English-style cod or choose from the extensive sushi menu. 2208 Penn Ave., Strip District; 412/434-7200, pennavefishcompany.com. - C.H.

Best Dim Sum: Family-owned Jimmy Wan's Restaurant and Lounge offers a little taste of everything on its dim-sum menu. The traditional Asian tapas are perfect for sharing with friends alongside a pot of Chinese tea. Try the vegetable and steamed-shrimp dumplings or pork shu mai (pork, shrimp and mushroom filling wrapped in a handmade pasta shell). Pair these with an order of lotus-leaf-wrapped rice stuffed with chicken, roast pork, Chinese sausage and shiitake mushrooms, then steamed. 1686 Route 228, Cranberry, 724/778-8978; 1337 Old Freeport Road, O'Hara, 412/968-0848, jimmywans.com. - C.H.

Best Fried Chicken: Southern cooking this good is hard to come by on our side of the Mason-Dixon Line. But at Jean's Southern Cuisine, macaroni and cheese, collard greens, potato salad, black-eyed peas and cornbread are the definition of classic soul food. Of course, these down-home sides go best with the main dish: Jean's mouthwatering fried chicken. The juicy, fall-off-the-bone meat is smothered in a peppered-to-perfection batter, creating the most wonderfully crispy and flaky crust. It's Southern comfort at its golden-brown best. 730 Penn Ave., Wilkinsburg; 412/242-4084. - C.H.

Best Grilled Cheese: Point Brugge Café's grilled cheese is definitely an upgrade from Mom's quick-fix lunch for the kiddos. Fresh, classic rye from local bread bakery Mediterra is topped with a blend of cheddar and gruyère cheeses and roasted red peppers, then griddle pressed to perfection. Although it's served with a salad or apple and cabbage slaw, order a side of the Brugge frites, twice fried in true Belgian fashion and served with basil mayonnaise - a delightful complement to an already-delightful sandwich. 401 Hastings St.,

Point Breeze; 412/441-3334, pointbrugge.com. - C.H.

Best Wine Made in a Firehouse: Duane Rieder is a man of many hats - and the latest on his résumé? Wine maker extraordinaire. His gorgeously renovated Penn Avenue firehouse is home to his photography studio, rentable venue space and the Roberto Clemente Museum. And as if that weren't enough, he decided to start making wine in the basement under the name Engine House No. 25 Wines. Rieder orders grapes from California and Chile to his wine-press cellar, where he concocts delectable zinfandels, cabernets, chardonnays and merlots in state-of-the-art, temperature-controlled stainless-steel tanks. 3339 Penn Ave., Lawrenceville; 412/621-1268. - C.H.

Best New Wine Bar: We raise our glass to Sewickley's newest wine bistro. The vine-covered pergola and rustic Mediterranean accents at The Naked Grape make this intimate space feel as if it is straight out of Tuscany. Seasonal dishes are served alongside the diverse list of wines, which range from value merlots to fine chardonnays. And whether you're a serious wine connoisseur or just dabble, the pairings are sure to please the palate. Try Giuseppe's Artisan Cheese & Fruit, served with gourmet mustards and paired with a full-bodied, buttery white wine. 515 Broad St., Sewickley; 412/741-6420, nakedgrape.net. - C.H.

Best Pre-Prohibition-Style Cocktails: Embury, a speakeasy-style cocktail bar on the first floor of Firehouse Lounge in the Strip District, is keen on classic spirits such as bourbon and whiskey. And if you're lucky, you'll find Fred Sarkis behind the bar, where he mixes up cocktails such as the Guilty Rose (made with Campari, gin and St. Germain elderflower liqueur) and the Jefferson's Quill (bourbon, lemon juice, blackberry syrup, aged bitters and two mint sprigs). Sarkis uses only quality liquors, fresh juices and herbs, and homemade tinctures and syrups. At Embury, every seemingly sinful sip is worth savoring. 2216 Penn Ave., Strip District; 412/434-1230. - C.H.

Best Celebrity-Inspired Dessert: Christos' Mediterranean Grill's cuisine may be Greek, but its feel is all-American. Owner Christos Melacrinis, once personal chef to Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis aboard the Onassis yacht, has decorated the walls with old photos and personal mementos from his days cooking for the American icon. It's only fitting he include her favorite cake on his dessert menu. The Jackie O is a scrumptious vanilla cake topped with custard, honey, cinnamon and whipped cream. It's a sophisticated treat for before or

after a Cultural District event. 130 Sixth St., downtown; 412/261-6442. - C.H.

Readers Poll: Food & Drink

Best Neighborhood Joint:

Point Brugge Café

401 Hastings St., Point Breeze

412/441-3334, pointbrugge.com

Best Wine Cellar: (tie):

The Wine Loft Pittsburgh

2773 Tunnel Blvd., SouthSide Works, South Side

412/586-5335, thewineloftpittsburgh.com

Eleven Contemporary Kitchen

1150 Smallman St., Strip District

412/201-5656, bigburrito.com/eleven

Best Coffee Shop:

Crazy Mocha Coffee Co.

crazymocha.com

Best Bakery:

SweetHouse Bake Shop

118 Grand Ave., Mars

724/687-0170, sweethousebakeshop.com

Best Caterer:

big Burrito

bigburrito.com

Best Local Winery:

La Casa Narcisi Winery

4578 Gibsonia Road (Route 910), West Deer Township

724/444-4744, narcisiwinery.com

Best Wait Staff + Service:

Enrico's Ristorante

5863 Ellsworth Ave., Shadyside

412/661-1050, enricos-shadyside.com

Best Cup of Coffee:

Coffee Tree Roasters' Caramel Café

Locations in Squirrel Hill, Mount Lebanon, O'Hara and Shadyside

coffeetree.com

Arts, Entertainment & Leisure

Best Reopening: Dormont's Hollywood Theatre, which was treated to \$300,000 in renovations in 2006, is now under the management of Motion Picture Heritage Corp. (MPH), a group based in Indianapolis that operates, and seems to truly appreciate, classic cinemas. According to Bill Dever of MPH, the art-deco-style single-screen theater, built in the 1920s, will host classic films, "B-movies," independent films, current releases, family matinees, film festivals, theme nights (including Rocky Horror Picture Show) and live music. The venue reopened this August, and future plans for the 298-seat venue include a cafe and lounge. 1449 Potomac Ave., Dormont; hollywooddormont.com. - J.W.

Best Clubhouse: When it comes to battling cancer, medical care is only the half of it. Gilda's Club Western Pennsylvania offers a program of social and emotional support for anyone living with cancer - men, women, teens and children along with their friends and families. The club organizes social activities and in-house lectures and workshops such as yoga and meditation, nutritious cooking and stress reduction, and includes a state-of-the-art kitchen, a children's playroom and a media room. Membership is free; donations support Gilda's Club. 2816 Smallman St., Strip District; 412/338-1919, gildasclubwesternpa.org. - C.H.

Best Re-Invention of a Pittsburgh Radio Legend: What a year Lynn Cullen's had. One of Pittsburgh's favorite broadcasters, the self-proclaimed "Lone Liberal" of daily talk fell victim not once but twice to radio station format changes in '09. But who needs "old

media"? Cullen now entertains loyal listeners here and around the world via online streaming on City Paper's Web site. Her show airs live from 10 to 11 a.m. every weekday, with previous broadcasts archived for download from the site at any time. "I'm thrilled to be back with my audience again," Cullen says, "annoying right-wingers 24 hours a day." "Lynn Cullen Live" can be heard at pghcitypaper.com. - J.W.

Best Neighborhood Artwork: The Pittsburgh region is a bastion of local pride. You'll see a glimpse of it as you cross the Rankin Bridge to enter the borough of Braddock and are greeted by a stunning 10-by-12-foot mosaic mural, which spells out the words, "Welcome to Historic Braddock," in bits of sparkling mirror, tile, stone and stained glass. Uptown sculptor James Simon unveiled the mosaic in the summer of 2007 as part of Braddock's Community Day festivities, and it continues to inspire residents: This summer, planning began for a 10-panel mural to be mounted on the facade of a new housing development for senior citizens on struggling Braddock Avenue. - Melissa Rayworth

Best Reason to Go Into the Woods at Night: Relax - we're not talking about spying on your neighbors. We're talking about the "Star Parties" thrown by the Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh. Scheduled throughout the year at both Wagman Observatory (Deer Lakes Regional Park, Allegheny County) and Mingo Creek Park Observatory (Mingo Creek County Park, Washington County), the parties are free-of-charge (though donations are always welcome). AAAP members arrive just before sunset and set up their personal telescopes, sharing the celestial view with anyone who wishes to take a peek. 3ap.org. - M.R.

Best Ballroom Dance Lessons: Whether you have two left feet and you're trying to avoid looking like a fool at your wedding, or you're an advanced dancer who lives to perform, Absolute Ballroom Dance Center of Pittsburgh is sure to teach you some fun new moves. With ballroom classes for all skill levels, students learn to waltz, swing and foxtrot. And if you're looking for a challenge, the center also specializes in African dance, West Coast swing, Argentine tango and other spirited styles. 6617 Hamilton Ave., East Liberty; 412/441-1461, absoluteballroompgh.com. - C.H.

Readers Poll: Arts, Entertainment & Leisure

Best Music Venue, Classical:

Heinz Hall

Sixth Street, downtown
412/392-4900, pittsburghsymphony.org

Best Music Venue, Jazz: (tie):

Manchester Craftsmen's Guild
1815 Metropolitan St., North Shore
412/323-4000, mcgjazz.org

Firehouse Lounge "Thursdays with Etta Cox"

2216 Penn Ave., Strip District
412/434-1230, firehouse-lounge.com

Best Performing Arts Venue:

Benedum Center for the Performing Arts
Seventh Street, downtown
412/456-6666, pgharts.org

Best Theater Company:

City Theater Co.
1300 Bingham St., South Side
412/431-2489, citytheatrecompany.org

Best Movie Theater:

A.M.C. Loews Waterfront 22
300 Waterfront Drive, West Homestead
412/462-6923, amctheatres.com

Best Library:

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Main
4400 Forbes Ave., Oakland
412/622-3114, clpgh.org/locations/main

Best Music Venue, Pop: (tie):

Mr. Smalls Theatre
400 Lincoln Ave., Millvale

412/821-4447, mrsmalls.com

Post-Gazette Pavilion

665 Route 18, Hanover Township, Washington County

724/947-7400, livenation.com

Best Place for People-Watching: (tie):

South Side

southsidepgh.com

Kennywood Park

4800 Kennywood Blvd., West Mifflin

412/461-0500, kennywood.com

Best Fitness Club:

Club One

club1pittsburgh.com

Best Local Dance Company:

Bodiography Contemporary Ballet Co.

5824 Forbes Ave., Squirrel Hill

412/521-6094, 412/425-3766, bodiographybc.com

Best Weekend Trip:

Washington, D.C.

washington.org

Best Camp Site:

Cook Forest State Park

River Road and Route 36, Clarion, Forest and Jefferson counties

814/744-8407, cookforest.com

Best Walking Trail:

Frick Park

2005 Beechwood Blvd., Squirrel Hill

412/422-6538, pittsburghparks.org

Best Fitness Class:

Hot Yoga at Amazing Yoga

amazingyoga.net

Kids & Family

Best Baby Tour: Taking on the city can be a little intimidating for anyone, especially a stroller-toting mom with her unpredictable tots. Knowing this, downtown resident and full-time mom Rachel Booth created Urban Baby Tours, which include the "Get Around Town" tour, "Fountain Crawl," "Artsy Baby" and "Park Play." Each tour has a guide, a designated start time and meeting place, and offers a pre-planned day downtown with your baby. So drop the juice-stained map and rumpled guidebook, and enjoy an effortless day with your little ones. Open to adults with children up to 5 years old. \$20-\$25. 412/480-8264, urbanbabytours.com. - C.H.

Best Spooky (But Not Scary) Halloween Event: Pittsburghers have been celebrating Halloween at Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium's ZooBoo for more than a decade, and each year new trick-or-treaters discover the magic. This annual event (this year on Oct. 17-18 and Oct. 24-25, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.) includes a haunted house, trick-or-treating, strolling entertainers, and a costume parade and contest. There is no additional charge - ZooBoo is included in your basic zoo admission for the day. Kids are given trick-or-treat bags and might even get a glimpse of the animals munching on Halloween treats of their own (like pumpkins). Sponsored by KDKA. 1 Wild Place, Highland Park; 412/665-3640, pittsburghzoo.org. - M.R.

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Best Park 'n' Ride: Pittsburghers will tell you that the view from Mount Washington is

stunning. They'll tell you that riding the Monongahela Incline is fun even if you've done it a dozen times before. But how often do most of us take advantage of this local treasure? At just \$2 per ticket, the incline provides inexpensive fun for the whole family. Ride it to Station Square and take the little ones to the fountain at Bessemer Court for an elaborately choreographed display of water and light. When the evening's done, hop back onto the incline for a stunning view of the city lights and stars. portauthority.org, stationsquare.com. - M.R.

Best Kid-Friendly Furniture Shopping: There's a reason you rarely see a toddler mid-tantrum in an IKEA store. Thanks to SmåLänd, a supervised nature-themed play area, Mom and Dad are free to search for the perfect sofa without dragging the kids around the massive store. There are some restrictions (kids must be between 37 and 54 inches tall and potty-trained). But once inside, they can dive into the ball pit, complete arts and crafts projects or climb giant milk crates. Coming this month: a loyalty program, through which frequent visitors earn free ice cream. 2001 Park Manor Blvd., Robinson Township; 412/747-0440, ikea.com. - M.R.

Best Birthday Party for Kids: The price (\$400 for members, \$500 for nonmembers) is, well, dinosaur-sized. But many Pittsburghers believe a Dinosaur Birthday Party at Carnegie Museum of Natural History (CMNH) is worth the investment. These customizable parties include everything a dino-loving kid could want: an interactive dinosaur talk led by a CMNH teacher, a docent-led tour of the impressive permanent dinosaur fossil exhibit "Dinosaurs in Their Time," a fossil-casting activity and dino-focused games. Each guest (up to 24 total, including parents who accompany their tots) gets a dinosaur party hat, cup and coloring book. Cake, ice cream and juice boxes are also included. 4400 Forbes Ave., Oakland. Events contact: 412/622-3289; info: carnegiemnh.org/doi/programs/birthdays.htm. - M.R.

Best Outdoor Activity: Maybe you discovered Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve as a school kid in the 1970s or '80s. Or maybe you heard about it from friends and were amazed to find such a pristine swath of nature so close to the city line. Whatever draws you to Beechwood - wildflowers, bird spotting, free hikes led by trained naturalists - odds are you'll keep coming back for more. It's a great place for the family to slow down, appreciate nature and mix fun with learning. Check out the Web site for information on classes, the Natural History Library and the on-site Audubon Nature Store. Five miles of scenic trails are open dawn to dusk, year-round, with no admission charge. 614 Dorseyville Road, Fox Chapel; 412/963-6100, aswp.org. - M.R.

Readers Poll: Kids & Family

Best Kid-Friendly Restaurant:

Eat'n Park Restaurants

eatnpark.com

Best Free Activity:

Reading Hour at the Carnegie Libraries of Pittsburgh

412/622-3114, clpgh.org

Best Events for Kids and Families:

Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium

1 Wild Place, Highland Park

412/665-3640, pittsburghzoo.com

Best Community Pool:

Dormont Swimming Pool

1801 Dormont Ave., Dormont

412/341-7210, boro.dormont.pa.us

Best Second-Hand Shop for Kids:

Once Upon a Child

412/788-8000, ouac.com

Best Kids Shoes:

Littles Shoes

5850 Forbes Ave., Squirrel Hill

800/646-7463, littlesshoes.com

Pets

Best Dog Pool: During the dog days of summer, humans aren't the only ones looking to take a dip. Lucky Paws Pet Resort offers the area's only dog pool, available for all of your pup's aquatic and tail-splashing needs. Let your canine romp in the 3,000-square-foot skid-resistant pool, which has a shallow end for the little ones and a deeper end for all those doggy paddlers. 2273 Lovi Road, Freedom; 724/728-1484, luckypawsresort.com. - C.H.

Best Pet-Friendly Community: The Cork Factory loft apartments on the Allegheny River are urban, chic and pet-friendly. The facility includes a dog park fully equipped with doggie bags and open green space, and there's also access to walking trails along the Allegheny

River. To top it all off, canine dwellers have their own separate counter at the concierge desk, where they can stop in for a treat before heading home. It's no wonder these dogs are giving the Cork Factory four-paws-up. 2349 Railroad St., Strip District; 412/281-5556, thecorkfactory.com. - C.H.

Best Dog Massage: Treat your pup to the ultimate in pooch pampering with a day at Cozy Inn: Pet Resort and Orchid Spa. The massages provide relief for dogs with joint pains. Have your pup try a Swedish or sports massage, which may have even the most active pets cooed into relaxation. Surrounded by soothing colors, music and skylights, these spoiled doggies may never want to leave. It's a dog-eat-dog world out there - couldn't we all use a little more Zen? 1600 Pet Place, Plum; 412/798-5297, cozyinnpetresort.com. - C.H.

Best Pet Villa: Fuzzy Paws Pet Villa & Spa creates the finest home away from home for your pooch. With overnight accommodations as well as doggie day care, the villa also features dog-loving workers who provide pets with all the TLC they need when spending time away from their owners. Not only do the pups each get their own room with a bed, they're also comforted with the sounds of music and televisions - just like home. Your pet is sure to be occupied, as he or she is taken out eight times a day in the facility's open green spaces and playgrounds. 20 Cheslock Road, North Strabane; 724/746-3899, fuzzy-paws.com. - C.H.

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Best Pet Sitting in Your Home: If your four-legged friend prefers the comforts of home, Steel City Pet Sitters allows you to go away without having to relocate your pet. At a rate of \$18 a visit for up to two pets, your furry pal will be walked, fed, brushed and played with. The company can also provide general house sitting, which includes watering the plants, bringing in the mail and alternating lights or blinds. Your pet sitter keeps a daily journal, and can also provide additional services such as key pick-up/drop-off and holiday visits. 412/496-5896, steelcitypetsitters.com. - C.H.

Best Community Pet Event: Once a month, the Pittsburgh Pirates welcome dogs into the ballpark for Pup-Night at PNC Park. This month, pet owners and their canines are invited to the Southwest Flight Deck on Tues., Sept. 22, as the Pirates take on the Cincinnati Reds. Doggie gift baskets and prizes will be given out, and there will be plenty of water stations and treats on hand. A portion of the proceeds benefits the Western Pennsylvania Humane Society and Animal Friends. Tickets: 412/325-4797, pirates.com. - C.H.

Readers Poll: Pets

Best Pet Store:

Petco

888/824-7257, petco.com

Best Pet Day Care:

Camp Bow Wow

Locations in Ross Township, Green Tree and Castle Shannon

412/276-9247, campbowwowusa.com

Best Veterinarian:

Good Shepherd Veterinary Hospital

101 Fox Trot Drive, Cranberry Township

724/776-7387, gsveterinaryhospital.com

Best Pet Event:

Bark in the Park

North Park's South Ridge Loop

Sun., Aug. 23

412/847-7055, thinkingoutsidethecage.org

Best Obedience Training:

Margie Sarver, Sarver's Dog Obedience

3450 Evergreen Road, McCandless Township

412/364-5574

Best Pet Hotel/Resort:

Lucky Paws Resort

2273 Lovi Road, Freedom

724/728-1484, luckypawsresort.com

Services

Best Organic Day Spa: Want to spoil yourself for an afternoon? Pay a visit to ESSpa Kozmetika Organic Skincare, owned by former Hungarian model Eva Sztupka and her husband, Pittsburgh native Scott Kerschbaumer. They've rehabbed one of the oldest auto-mechanic shops in Western Pennsylvania (Humes Ford, circa 1915!) using recycled and other sustainable materials. To make your skin look its best, Sztupka uses a mix of organic products handmade in Hungary and in Pittsburgh. Surf the list of discounted packages for indulgences that won't bust your budget. 17 Brilliant Ave., Aspinwall; 412/782-3888, esspa.net/welcome.html - M.R.

Best Chocolate Fix Without the Calories: What if there were a way to satisfy your cocoa craving without the sugary calories? Centre Avenue Massage & Spa's Chocolate Mud Wrap (\$220) offers a sweet - and healthy - alternative. The decadent two-hour treatment begins with gentle, full-body exfoliation. Next, a mixture of therapeutic mud and cocoa is applied to the skin to hydrate, flush the lymphatic system, diminish cellulite and soothe tired, achy joints. As the aromatic cocoa mixture detoxifies skin, the client's feet are massaged with peppermint foot cream, and after rinsing off in the spa shower, vanilla body butter is applied during a relaxing one-hour massage. Essex House, 5701 Centre Ave., Suite LL2, Shadyside; 412/661-7724, centreavespa.com. - Liz Fetchin

Best Eyebrow Shaping: Pamela Jeschonek, better known as Pittsburgh's "brow diva," doesn't simply wax eyebrows at her shop, Everyday Esthetics Makeup and Eyebrow Studio in Ambridge. In her own words, she performs "a subtle, artistic reshaping of your face, taking into account your bone structure, facial shape, feature size and overall facial symmetry." Jeschonek waxes and tweezes brows to arched perfection - the initial "design consultation" (\$40) takes a full hour, and subsequent "maintenance" visits run \$25 each. 1400 Church St., Ambridge; 412/716-4825, everydayesthetics.com. - M.R.

Best Way to See Pittsburgh Like a European: Straight out of London, The Pittsburgh Tour Co.'s red double-decker bus is the hippest way to get around town. Manufactured in 1964 for London Transport Co., the bus still sports its original checkerboard seat fabric. The tour loop runs down East Carson Street to Station Square, to the North Shore and PNC Park, through the Strip District and back to the South Side via the Hot Metal Bridge. There are eight stops along the way to hop off and view the city, with tour guides chatting about the city's history, fun facts and must-visit museums and restaurants. 412/381-8687, pghtours.com. - C.H.

Best Barbershop: Hey guys. Ever walk into a salon for a haircut and feel as if it's just a bit,

um, girly? Michael B's Gentleman's Barbershop is an upscale joint where you can get a classic cut from a trained, licensed barber. The shop is designed with men in mind, complete with leather and mahogany furniture, big-screen TVs and laid-back conversation. The shop also offers straight-razor shaves and coloring services. Most important, says owner Michael Beckadic, who's been cutting hair since age 12, a man will be treated like a gentleman and walk out looking like one. 2991 West Liberty Ave., Dormont; 412/551-4247, mbgbpittsburgh.com. - J.W.

Best Matchmaking: Lisdoonvarna is not the newest slogan from Volkswagen. It's a bi-annual event for locals looking for love of the everlasting kind. Each Valentine's Day and again in October, Mullaney's Harp & Fiddle Irish Pub hosts a party with Get-To-Know-You Games, drink specials, karaoke, fortune tellers, and, most important, matchmakers. Based on a traditional Irish matchmaking festival, Lisdoonvarna's proof of success is in the proposals. In 15 years, the event has resulted in more than 70 couples living happily ever after. 2329 Penn Ave., Strip District; 412/642-6622, harpandfiddle.com. - J.W.

Best Car Wash: Bringing a shine to a car that's been through a Pittsburgh winter - or that has suffered a bombing from vindictive pigeons - takes a magician. Legions of customers rely on Mr. Magic's five South Hills locations to give their cars that "just-washed" look. Celebrating 50 years, Mr. Magic's has a number of secrets to success, including its own "Magic Blend" of nine cleaning solutions and an advanced safe, effective hot-air drying system. Mr. Magic also offers daily specials (see the Web site), coupon books and a FastPass system for express service. Five locations; 412/343-3555, mrmagiccarwash.com. - J.W.

Best Tarot Readings While You Eat: How many restaurants offer the future on their menu? Gypsy Café, a South Side neighborhood gem, not only serves up an eclectic mix of Mediterranean and Pan-European cuisine, but also hosts Readings by Rebecca on Friday and Sunday evenings. You can reserve a 15- or 30-minute spot with Rebecca Bloom, but be sure to call ahead, because she tends to fill up quickly. With its wine-colored walls, Oriental rugs and tarot-reading side dish, you'll definitely be diggin' the bohemian vibe of this one-of-a-kind spot. 1330 Bingham St., South Side; 412/381-4977, gypsycafe.net. - C.H.

Best Shoe Shine: Albert Lexie of Monessen began shining shoes more than 40 years ago when he built a shoe-shine box in high school shop class. Now, he travels each week to various Mon Valley business districts, including those in Monessen, Charleroi, Donora and Monongahela, to give clearly brilliant shines. But perhaps the brightest shine is from within

Lexie. Since the early 1980s, he has donated more than \$100,000 in tips to Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh's Free Care Fund, which helps provide medical care to underprivileged children. It's \$3 for a standard shoe shine; all tips go to the hospital. - J.W.

Best Locksmith: Sure, when you need a key made you can go to an oh-by-the-way-we-make-keys station in a hardware or big-box store. But having locks that function reliably is important enough to go to a pro, and the go-to here in Pittsburgh is Ace Lock, co-founded by company president Sandra Hunter in 1975. Ace also offers repairs for specialized items such as entry intercoms, photo-ID badging equipment and safes. 5964 Baum Blvd., East Liberty; 412/363-3328, acelockinc.com. - J.W.

Best Wedding and Event Planner: Ask Tony Lee of Marriott's Renaissance Pittsburgh Hotel what makes a great wedding planner, and he hears you loud and clear. "Listening," Lee says, "is the most important thing, understanding not only what my clients want, but also why they want it." Lee says understanding the "why" helps him ensure the request is properly filled or enables him to suggest an ideal alternative if need be. The greatest reward? The happy couple, of course. "When the bridal couple, their families or guests come up to me, thanking me for a beautiful day - there's no feeling like it." 107 Sixth St., downtown; 412/562-1200, renaissancepittsburgh.com. - J.W.

Readers Poll: Services

Best Spa:

Pittsburgh Center for Complementary Health + Healing
1124 S. Braddock Ave., Suite B, Edgewood
412/242-4220, pghhealthandhealing.com

Best Cosmetic Dentist: (tie):

William Vitalie
5889 Forbes Ave., Squirrel Hill
412/521-4300, vitaliesmiles.com

Dr. Owen Cantor, D.M.D.
425 First Ave., downtown
412/261-2500, pittsburghdentalarts.com

Best Skin Treatments:

ESSpa Kozmetika
17 Brilliant Ave., Aspinwall

412/782-3888, esspa.net

Best Stylist/Hair Colorist:

Dan Burda of Studio Raw
3185 Babcock Blvd., Ross Township
888/729-2004, mystudioraw.com

Best Law Firm:

Cohen + Grigsby Law Firm
625 Liberty Ave., downtown
412/297-4900, cohenlaw.com

Best Architect:

Desmone + Associates Architects
1 Doughboy Square, 3400 Butler St., Lawrenceville
412/683-3230, desmone.com

Best Roofer:

Kress Brothers Builders
4930 S. Pioneer Road, Gibsonia
412/961-6825

Best Dry Cleaner:

Leff Marvin's Cleaners
4449 Ohio River Blvd., Bellevue
412/761-4054

Shopping

Best German Christmas Market: For one weekend each year, the Harmony Museum in Harmony, Butler County, transforms into a festive traditional German Christmas market, a WeihnachtsMarkt. This year, Nov. 14-15, historic Harmony will feature musicians and carolers, events for children and adults, a large entertainment tent, decorated streets, horse-and-buggy rides and traditional foods. But the biggest draw is the shopping. Vendors show extraordinary gifts including traditional German toys, steins, ornaments, nutcrackers and foods. 218 Mercer St., Harmony; 724/452-7341, harmonymuseum.org/christmasmarket.htm. - J.W.

Best Garden Shop: Ellie and Patrick Greaser bought Franklin Nursery from Patrick's

parents seven years ago and have grown it into a full-service center that's become a must-visit destination for garden lovers. Franklin specializes in ornamental and shade trees grown on the property, perennials, a well-stocked garden market and a gift shop that's open through Christmas. 2437 Rochester Road, Franklin Park; 412/366-8765, franklinnursery.com. - J.W.

Best Way to Go Retro: Entering Yesterday's News, a tiny boutique at the end of South Side's East Carson Street, is like taking a trip into the closets of stylish generations past. It's brimming with vintage pieces from the 1920s through the '80s, including polyester suits, double-breasted coats and patterned mod dresses, plus timelessly fabulous rings, pins and other jewelry. Try to embrace the large hair and flared pants of your past as you browse retro fashion favorites. 1405 E. Carson St., South Side; 412/431-1712. - C.H.

Best Gift Wrap for a Purchase Under \$10: The Chocolate Moose gets raves for its exquisite treats and impeccable service. But it's the extras that bring many customers back: Even the tiniest confection can be gift-wrapped at no extra charge. And rather than offering just one style of wrapping, the friendly folks at the Moose allow customers to choose from an assortment of luxury wrapping papers, colorful ribbons and bows. In a budget-conscious year, it's a great way to add glamour without adding cost. 5523 Walnut St., Shadyside; 412/688-8800; 5830 Forbes Ave., Squirrel Hill; 412/422-2208. - M.R.

Best Locally Owned Online Boutique: The story behind Modcloth is one modern-day Pittsburghers will recognize instantly: Two creative Carnegie Mellon University students - she's an artsy fashionista, and he's a tech wiz - pooled their talents to create a small Web-based business. They worked hard, believed in their vision and turned a part-time project into a successful full-time gig. (They also graduated and got married - no small list of accomplishments in just seven years!) The result of their hard work - Modcloth - offers online shoppers cool vintage-style clothes at livable prices. 888/495-9699, modcloth.com. - M.R.

Best Upscale Shoe Shopping: Bondstreet Shoes' chic gallery of footwear offers high-quality European-made shoe collections for both men and women ranging from about \$150 to \$350 a pair. It's the only place in the region where you can indulge in designer lines such as the Lloyd Trend Collection of Germany and Manas by Lea Foscati. This fall, check out the shop's new women's line from Tamaris of Germany, specializing in fashionable boots. The shop is a must for shoe-a-holics, where admitting (and accepting) that you have a problem is the first step... a very stylish step. 5842 Ellsworth Ave.,

Shadyside; 412/661-0450. - C.H.

Best (Free) Personal Shopper: Looking for the perfect outfit for your holiday party? Put in an online request for an appointment with a stylist at Ross Park Mall's Nordstrom. Indicate your size and specifications and he or she will choose clothing just for you. Need a gift? Your stylist can offer several options then have your choice gift-wrapped for free. "The personal style service is complimentary, and there is no minimum purchase required," says Nordstrom spokesperson John Bailey. 1000 Ross Park Mall Drive, Ross Township; 412/548-4300, secure.nordstrom.com/services/personal_touch.asp. - M.R.

Best Food Gifts: Gourmet goodies from Pennsylvania Macaroni Co. are classically Pittsburgh: fabulous and yet down-to-earth. This Strip District favorite offers staples for an unforgettable meal - think Zoe Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Davide and Victoria Pasta Sauce, Riscossa Farfalle and Dececco Penne - plus treats such as stuffed olives and tangy pepperoncini peppers. The staff will help you assemble the perfect assortment, or you can choose from one of the store's pre-assembled gift baskets. (Prices for gift baskets range from \$55 to \$139.99 - something for everyone.) 2010-2012 Penn Ave., Strip District; 412/471-8330, pennmac.com. - M.R.

Readers Poll: Shopping

Best New Boutique: (tie):

Serendipity Accessories to Express Yourself

Two PPG Place, downtown

412/325-1122, serendipityaccessories.com

Shop.412

420 S. 27th St., South Side

412/586-7507, shopfouronetwo.blogspot.com

Best Vintage Shop:

Eon's Fashion Antique

5850 Ellsworth Ave., Shadyside

412/361-3368

Best Florist:

Allison McGeary Floral & Event Design

3625 Butler St., Lawrenceville

412/621-6427, mcgearycreative.com

Best Jewelry:

Henne Jewelers

5501 Walnut St., Shadyside

412/682-0226, hennejewelers.com

Best Furniture:

Levin Furniture Co.

800/262-5200, levinfurniture.com

Best Storefront:

Toadflax Inc.

5500 Walnut St., Shadyside

412/621-2500, toadflax.com

Best Car Dealership:

No. 1 Cochran Automotive

412/349-1700, cochran.com

Best Food Store:

Whole Foods Market

5880 Centre Ave., Shadyside

412/441-7960, wholefoodsmarket.com

Best Card Shop:

Kards Unlimited

5522 Walnut St., Shadyside

412/622-0500

Best Lawn + Garden Center:

Sestili Nursery Inc.

3721 Swinburne St., Oakland

412/681-1200

Best Bridal Shop:

Anne Gregory for the Bride

695 Washington Road, Mount Lebanon

412/531-3160, annegregorybrides.com

Best Frame Shop:

Framework, LLC

5868 Forbes Ave., Squirrel Hill
412/421-4940, frameworkonforbes.com

Sports

Best Pittsburgh Sports Talker: Joe Starkey of ESPN 1250's Saturday-morning show features coherent, relevant sports talk; humor that doesn't insult your intelligence, and substantive interviews with people who actually have something to say and are worth listening to. That's not the usual local formula for sports talk radio, which tends more toward bluster and foolishness. Starkey's is the softer, saner voice on your radio dial. Call it sports talk that isn't a waste of time. Who knew? - B.M.

Best Image Reversal: Santonio Holmes getting busted for possession of three marijuana-filled cigars - a.k.a. blunts - outside Mellon Arena in the middle of pro-football season isn't usually the way Steelers players endear themselves to the masses. Even when it turned out that the police only stopped the Steelers wide receiver because his car resembled one they were looking for that was involved in a major drug deal and even when it was revealed that Holmes cooperated with police, he still wasn't out of the woods with fans. But then in Super Bowl XLIII, he made nine catches for 131 yards, including four on the final drive that he ended with a spectacular toe-tapping catch in the end zone to win the game. In June, police dismissed the charges against him, something Steelers fans had done four months earlier. - B.M.

Best Unusual Sporting Event: Forget the glamour of low-slung Indy cars or NASCAR racers swathed in sponsorships. For aficionados of real high-speed action, there's only one true mow-tor sport: Lawnmower racing. At Shadetree Center, five miles east of Butler off Route 422 in Butler County, riding mower racers come together on a variety of weekends to test their skills on the dirt oval. Believe it or not, lawnmower racing has its own national organization, the USLMRA (U.S. Lawn Mower Racing Association) and televised national competitions. For more information, visit shadetreecenter.com or the forums at heymow.com and search for "shadetree." - J.W.

Best Pittsburgh Athlete With Real Pittsburgh Roots: Yeah, we're the City of Champions, all right, only isn't it funny that most of those champions aren't really tied to the city except by a paycheck? That's the nature of professional sports, of course, which is why it's nice that every once in a while, the city produces a true local champion. So it was this past winter when DeJuan Blair - from Schenley High School and the Hill District - became a dominant force in college basketball and led Pitt to a 31-5 season and a trip to the Elite

Eight. After two seasons, it was inevitable that he'd head on to the National Basketball Association, which means he won't be representing a Pittsburgh team ever again. But, wherever he goes, we know he'll add a unique Pittsburgh flavor. - Bill MODOONO

Best Place to Relive the Glory Days: Pittsburgh's been accused of living too much in the past, and I suppose we're guilty as charged - with one notable exception. When it comes to sports, there's no time like the present in Pittsburgh. Just ask Cleveland. Still, if you'd like to remember back to the days when Pirates played in Oakland and Steelers fans enlisted in Franco's Italian Army, the Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum at Heinz History Center is your place. Want to see quick video synopses of the Steelers' first five Super Bowl victories with all the boring parts left out? Catch a glimpse of Mario Lemieux when he was young? It's all here. Just wander through. 1212 Smallman St., Strip District; 412/454-6000, heinzhistorycenter.org. - B.M.

Readers Poll: Sports

Best Local Athlete:

Sidney Crosby, Pittsburgh Penguins
penguins.nhl.com

Best Sports Team:

Pittsburgh Steelers
steelers.com

Best Coach:

Mike Tomlin, Pittsburgh Steelers
steelers.com

Best Sporting Goods:

Dick's Sporting Goods
dickssportinggoods.com

Best Stadium:

PNC Park
115 Federal St., North Shore
412/321-2827; tickets: 800/289-2827, pittsburghpirates.mlb.com

Best Play of the Year:

Santonio Holmes' Super Bowl touchdown catch.
steelers.com

Readers Poll: News Media

Best News Team:

Sally Wiggin and Mike Clark
WTAE-TV

Best Local Writer:

Gene Collier
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Best Morning Drive Team:

"WDVE Morning Show" with Jim Krenn and Randy Baumann
102.5 WDVE-FM

Worst Of's

Worst Sports "Oops!": Maybe the Pittsburgh Pirates' signing two contestants from an Indian reality show to minor-league contracts will turn out to be a brilliant idea. Maybe it's just the kind of outside-the-box thinking the Buccos need to demonstrate in order to be competitive again. Maybe. Until then, however, it just seems like a dumb, desperate idea, which feels dumber and more desperate because it was made by the Pirates. Here's hoping they get the last laugh. Here's thinking they won't. - B.M.

Worst Traffic Light: The Pittsburgh version of "(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66" might be "(I Downright Hate) Route 28." Nowhere is that traffic torture-fest more irritating than at the traffic light near St. Nicholas Church. Why? We asked Jim Lokay, KDKA-TV's morning traffic and transportation reporter. "What makes it the worst? Well, it's in the middle of a major highway, for one," Lokay says. But there's hope, according to Lokay, who says there are plans to get rid of the light in the next couple of years. Imagine the honks of joy. Jim Lokay is seen weekdays 5 a.m. to 7 a.m. on KDKA-TV, and 7 a.m. to 8 a.m. on the CW Television Network. You can follow him on Twitter at @jimlokay. - J.W.

Worst Local Highway to Rubberneck On: Any of them! Aren't our parkways and tunnels enough to deal with? Are fender-benders and disabled cars really that mesmerizing? You know who you are. We see you in front of us, looking right, looking ahead, looking right, looking ahead, your bright-red brake lights taunting us. We'd like to invent ShoulderLane TV just for you so you could get your fix of side-of-the-road kicks. We have places to go,

people. Put your blinders on and move it. - J.W.

Worst Time to Forget Your Towel: New Year's Day morning. Well, that is, if you're a member of the Pittsburgh Polar Bear Club and you've decided to join the faithful for a relaxing dip in the well-chilled Mon. The 2009 event featured hundreds of brave souls who jumped into 38-degree water and re-emerged (most of them very quickly) into 18-degree air. This is no time to ask if you can borrow a towel. donnan.com/Pittsburgh-PolarBears.htm. - J.W.

Readers Poll: Worst Of

Worst Publicity Stunt: When Luke Ravenstahl temporarily changed his last name to "Steelerstahl" when the Steelers played the Baltimore Ravens.

Worst Intersection: Routes 51 and 88 in the South Hills.

Worst Sports News: Bill Cowher rooting against the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Worst Decision Made by a Politician: Luke Ravenstahl's garbage can campaign.

Worst Eyesore: Route 51.

Worst Loss to the Local Dining Scene: Richard Chen in EastSide District, East Liberty.

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Top 10

The 10 best things to do in Pittsburgh in June.



Keeping It Real

PittGirl learns to embrace the 'Burgh's (gulp) flaws.



Best Restaurants 2013

Presenting 34 of the finest, freshest and most forward-thinking restaurants in Pittsburgh. Bon appetit!



Chef of the Year Award: 2013

Mr. Shu, executive chef of Umi, is honored for his consistent perfection.



Marc-Andre Fleury in the Hot Seat

The Penguins' curiously laid-back last line of defense is not your average 'tender.



Best New Restaurant: 2013

Chef Matthew Porco's Italian-inspired Sienna Sulla Piazza is lighting up Market Square.

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Want some fascinating inside info on Crosby, Letang, Fleury and Bylsma? Read our Penguins Mega Roundtable. ow.ly/m3k9v

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Our Mega Roundtable on the Penguins' future reveals some fascinating inside info on Crosby, Letang and Fleury. ow.ly/m3k9v

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