



2011 Best of State College

You voted, and here they are: some perennial favorites mix with new faces among the **2011 winners of the Best of State College** annual survey of readers.

by D.K. Higgins, Kiera Missanelli, Michael Verbickas and Jennifer Zeigler

**Restaurants,
Bars,
Doctors,
Car Dealers,
Grocery Stores,
Shops,
Parks,
Festivals,
Gyms,
Spas,
A Kennel,
And One Really Big University...**

The Centennial Pigs know what gives this town its character; they're part of it too—the Best of State College.

PHOTOS BY MATT FERN

BEST PEOPLE

Best Doctor

Brian Shunk, D.O.

Practicing in State College for just three years, Dr. Brian Shunk calls his best doctor nod an honor. "And it's humbling," he says. "There's certainly a number of great

physicians in our community." He must be one of them. A family practitioner who learned his profession in the U.S. Army, serving in Iraq, Germany and Texas, he says he loves the mix of ages he gets to care for here—from children to college students to elderly retirees. "It's fun to see when the good things happen, and

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it's not as fun, but it's rewarding, to help them through the more difficult times."



Best Broadcast Personality

Jeff Brown

The perennial winner in this category, Jeff Brown hosts a popular morning show on 93.7 The Bus. He also recently hosted Chefs on Stage, the annual charity event sponsored by SCM. Brown, however, is no gourmet, and his disdain for vegetables is legendary. "I never met a vegetable I liked," he says.

Best Dentist

Brian White, D.D.S.

Dr. Brian White has been a dentist in State College since 1975 and is humbled to be named State College's best dentist. White credits his excellent staff, self-management and marketing techniques over the past couple years as the reasons for being recognized. "We try very hard to take care of our patients and make sure their needs are well-served," White says.

Best Public Servant

TIE: Mayor Elizabeth Goreham and Rep. Kerry Benninghoff

Best Writer

Ali Warren

Commitment is a familiar characteristic for Boalsburg native Ali Warren. A volunteer firefighter, Warren published her first book, "Where Hope Lives," last year, detailing her experiences in the firehouse. She wrote the memoir over the span of

several years and worked 60 hours a week to earn enough to have it published. After doing no promotion of its release, the community response came as a significant surprise, she says. "It's such an honor to be chosen," Warren says. "People are getting things out of the book I never intentionally put into the story."

Best Real Estate Agent

Beth Richards

Beth Richards credits The Golden Rule in being named best real estate agent—she says she treats her clients the way she would wish to be treated. "My core philosophy is to do what is in the best interest of one's clients, and I think with that philosophy you can't go wrong," Richards says. The Beth Richards Group, within best real estate company Kissinger Bigatel & Brower, takes a referral-only approach to provide clients with an exclusive buying or selling experience. "I've got the best clients on the planet," Richards says.

BEST SHOPPING

Best Real Estate Company

Kissinger Bigatel & Brower

In perhaps the most difficult real estate market State College has ever known, Kissinger Bigatel & Brower are honored to be recognized as best real estate company. "We have a very well-trained group of Realtors that concentrate on customer service and personal client care," says partner and broker Mark Bigatel.

Best Grocery

Best Bread

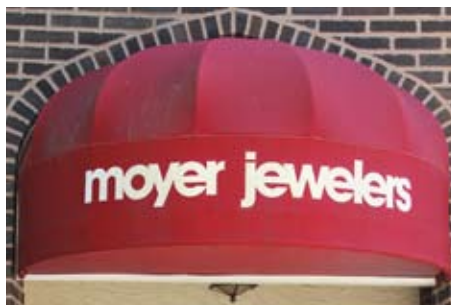
Wegmans

Best Gift Shop

A Basket Full

She's been in business for 21 years, but Pam Bair credits her daughter Jenn Bair, who came home from California six years ago to join the family business

in Boalsburg, with so much of what the gift shop is today. "We started out very country. I've got to be honest; this is all her," Pam says with a wave at the trendy, upscale lines that now fill the rooms at A Basket Full. In changing what they carry, the Bair duo brought in new customers, but kept many of the old ones as well—one has been shopping there all 21 years. "They are our friends," Pam says.



Best Jewelry Store

Best Customer Service

Moyer Jewelers

Laura Moyer considers unbeatable cus-

tomers service and product expertise reasons why Moyer Jewelers has remained a family-run business for three generations. "We have loyal customers and fans," Moyer says. "We're a family business, which means we have flexibility." Sales associates know the products glittering in the glass cases, and if they don't know an answer to a customer's question, they'll work to find it. And services such as free delivery, gift wrapping and complimentary watch repair keep customers happy.

Best New Car Dealer

Dix Honda Co.

Dave Dix says the low-pressure style of business at Dix Honda, in addition to top customer service, is the reason his dealership was voted best new car dealership once again. "We're thrilled to be recognized. It's very nice to feel that people value doing business with us, and Honda continues to have a knack for coming up

with the right product at the right time," Dix says.

Best Used Car Dealer

TIE: Jabco-Maggi Motors and Joel Confer's Auto Outlet

There's not a used car that comes through Joel Confer's Auto Outlet that son Corey Confer does not touch. And only about a tenth of the trade-ins end up on the sales lot. "I decide if it's something I would buy, and if it's not, I sell it [at an auction]," he says. "I want my customers to be very, very comfortable with my cars, that there's no worries." That extra mile is important for Jabco-Maggi as well, says vice president Todd Maggi, who adds that the dealership finds success in having the right used car on the lot for his customers. What that right car is, however, is the million dollar question, he says. Confer would agree. "It's whatever the customer is looking for," he says.

Best Furniture Store

Wolf Furniture

Best Hardware Store

Lowe's Home Improvement

Walk into the massive do-it-yourself home improvement store and you'll see Lowe's carries products that fit the needs of the local market and also a staff trained to help shoppers find the best materials for their personal projects. "We're proud to be recognized in our local marketplace—it reinforces all the efforts we put forth," manager Ray Forziat says.

Best New Retail Store

Fairways and Greens

BEST PLACES

Best Health Club

The North Club

It's the atmosphere that sets The North Club apart from other gyms, says club manager Eric Weidenhof. The mix of



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senior "Silver Sneakers" members, competitive athletes and everyday folks are encouraged equally by staff in enthusiastic, non-judgmental support. "We don't tell people, 'sorry, you don't fit our profile,'" he says. Instead, employees learn the names of members, getting to know their habits and their personal details. Weidenhof even greets a German-speaking member in his native tongue one morning as he walks in for his workout. "It really is all about the members," Weidenhof says.

Best Day Spa

Designer's Denn Salon and Spa

Owner Melinda Hooper says being voted best day spa for several years in a row has to do with the unique culture Designer's Denn provides State College residents. The salon prides itself on an in-house skill certification and educational environment for each staff member and also its well-trained leadership team comprised of managers and assistant

managers. "We are on a continuous improvement plan here, and our staff is very well-educated in guest services, technical skills, professionalism and leadership," Hooper says.



Best Kennel

Royal Pet Resort

It would not be adequate, or even appropriate, to call Royal Pet Resort a mere kennel. It's more like a four-star hotel/spa for dogs, cats, birds and exotic pets. Located in Julian, RPR is an activity-oriented facility owned and operated by Becky Koleno, who studied animal science and business administration at

Penn State and has, for the last decade, served on the Board of Directors for Centre Wildlife Care. "When you go on vacation, the last thing you should worry about is the care of your pets," Koleno says. "We strive to offer [them] the ultimate safe and fun environment for their vacation."

Best Conference Center

Best Sunday Brunch

The Penn Stater

The Penn Stater's people are what helped the location secure the best conference center and best Sunday brunch nominations again this year, says Jim Purdum, the general manager for hospitality services. His staff tries "to make it a special experience [for guests] no matter how large or small an event," he says. The Penn Stater also contains unique features that lend to holding daily functions, meetings and events. "There are options there you won't find [elsewhere] around the country," he says.

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Best Picnic Spot

Spring Creek Park

With wide-open fields, a clear view of the surrounding mountains and the trickling sound of Spring Creek, it is no wonder the Houserville park was named best picnic spot. Covered pavilions and a quaint covered bridge in the distance make the park an even more inviting location for an al fresco meal, and the jovial playground creates a perfect family environment.



Best Playground

Circleville Park

Best Place to Work

Penn State University

The opportunity to be around students is what Annemarie Mountz enjoys most about working for Penn State. Mountz, director of public information, says it is the positive atmosphere and close connection to the community that make Penn State a great place to work. Centre County's largest employer, Penn State maintains an active role in the community, as university employees and students live and work in the area, Mountz says. "We are the community."

Best Retirement Community

Traditions of America at Liberty Hill

Best Fundraiser

THON

Students and community members continue to donate to THON, Penn State's student-run philanthropy that raises money for pediatric cancer treatment and research, in record numbers: more than \$9.5

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million last year. Public Relations Chair Kirsten Quisenberry insists the organization's message does not go unnoticed by students. "THON is a great asset to the community and students at large," she says. "THON instills a lifelong commitment to service and shows students the importance of giving back."

Best Community Event **Central Pennsylvania Festival** **of the Arts**

Executive director Rick Bryant believes

it is the unique opportunity for buyers to meet with craftspeople that sets the Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts apart from competitors. You usually don't have the opportunity to purchase an item from the person who thought of and created it, Bryant says. The festival also provides an opportunity for friends and family to meet once a year and do some shopping together, even if State College is a town they don't come to by accident. "We're very proud to do so well for a rural area," Bryant says.

BEST FOOD AND DRINK

Best Happy Hour

TIE: American Ale House and Grill **and Bill Pickle's Tap Room**

Bill Pickle's neighborhood bar makes students and residents alike feel right at home. "The local community at large has embraced us as a gathering place of all ages and walks of life—all having a great time together—be it 21 or 91," says general manager Michael James. Discounting all beers and liquors during happy hour makes the watering hole stand out, he says. That, and an entertainment lineup that has toes tapping seven days a week. Cheers. [Editor's note: for information about the Ale House, see "Best Outdoor Dining" on page 38.]

Best Wine List

Best Martini

Best Romantic Restaurant

Zola New World Bistro

Walk into Zola and be transported to a sensual, urban-city environment in the heart of State College that whispers romance. Co-owner and corporate sommelier Dave Fonash says, "Our original goal when we started 10 years ago was to provide people with an experience when they went out. When diners come into Zola we don't want them to

necessarily feel like they are in State College." In addition to the environment, the innovative and local cuisine is perfectly paired with either a glass of wine or cocktail.

Best Beer List

Otto's Pub and Brewery

Best Coffee

Starbucks

Best Breakfast

Original Waffle Shop

The origin of the waffle dates back to the Middle Ages, but North America was first introduced to them by the Pilgrims, who prepared them like the unleavened breakfast cakes made with barley and oats that were all the rage in Holland. Of course, American waffles are now generally made with white flour, as are the lighter, thicker Belgian waffles, which were first introduced to this country at the 1964 New York World's Fair. Two years later John Dimakopoulos left Greece; six years after that, he opened the first Waffle Shop on West College Avenue, in 1972. Next year, Dimakopoulos will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Original Waffle Shop, now a fanatically popular local franchise.

Best Sub

McLanahan's Downtown Market

Best Takeout

TIE: Fuji and Jade Garden
and Golden Wok



Best Sandwich

HoneyBaked Ham

For four years now, HoneyBaked Ham has been voted best sandwich by readers, and for good reason. "We've built a good reputation for quality and service," owner Joe Beddall says, crediting freshness and new products for the continued interest in his sandwiches. He says he is honored to be recognized for the hard work.

Best Salad

Home Delivery Pizza Pub

Servers at Home Delivery place orders for several hundred salads a day—and that's just at the State College location, which may explain why the restaurant probably better known for its pizza landed the best salad category this year. Cooks toss fresh greens, herbs, home-made dressings and chicken that's been hanging out in a marinade for a full day into enormous salads that can serve as dinner tonight, and lunch tomorrow.

Best Burger

Five Guys Burgers and Fries

Best Pizza

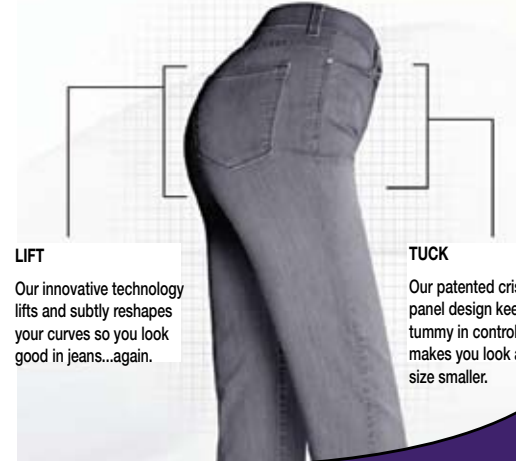
Faccia Luna

Best Wings

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Kelly's Steak and Seafood

Kelly's has won best steak for the past seven years and seafood for the past five years, and owner Sean Kelly credits simplicity. "We start off with really fresh, high-quality ingredients and that makes it easiest to put out the best product," Kelly says. The restaurant's casual elegance is great—whether it be a Tuesday night or an anniversary. "We feel really privileged that people are recognizing us for having the best steak and seafood," Kelly says.



Best Business Lunch

The Corner Room

Best Health Menu

Best Caterer

Best Wait Service

Harrison's Wine Grill and Catering

In a seven-year sweep, Harrison's takes the cake for best caterer, and this year the upscale casual restaurant can also add best health menu as well as best wait service to its list. "Our customers have asked for special menu items that speak to vegetarians and speak to wanting gluten-free options that taste good, and we have really worked hard at trying to do that for both our restaurant and catering customers," says marketing director Karen Myford. "It reaffirms that we are continuing to get things right." The restaurant, which prides itself

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on using fresh and local ingredients, is clearly a favorite among healthy eaters. "We're so gratified to be acknowledged for our healthy menu," Myford says.

Best Barbecue

Clem's Wood-Fired BBQ

Best Dessert

The Deli

Best Late Night Bite

The Diner

Tradition and community recognition are two reasons people love coming to the Diner, general manager Jim Klein says. A grilled sticky in the wee hours is part of the State College experience, noted by documentary directors and students alike. "Recognition is part of the reason why we're still in business," Klein says. "The Diner is a State College tradition."

Best Asian

Cozy Thai Bistro



Best Ethnic

Herwig's Austrian Bistro

Some diners might be put off by having to pronounce the menu items correctly when ordering a meal, and then being threatened with a large wooden spoon if they don't finish it, but that's all part of the presentation at Herwig's, now a local culinary institution. Chef Bernd Brandstatter, who's often photographed gripping the wooden spoon in a menacing manner, was enamored as a youth of the flamboyant Gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson. This makes perfect sense. If there's such a thing as a Gonzo chef, Brandstatter would be it. "Thompson



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liked to push the boundaries, and I try to do the same thing," he admits. "But you try to have fun and do what you love, and I'm definitely doing that."



Best Sports Bar **Champs Sports Bar and Grill**

Best Outdoor Dining **American Ale House and Grill**

Nestled in a quiet location in the woods with a great dining deck and pleasant atmosphere, it is no wonder Ale House has earned recognition for best outdoor dining and happy hour. Owners Linda Silveri, Scott Lucchesi and Tommy Wareham say the outstanding and con-

sistent service, food and drinks add to the environment as well. "We're doing something right; guests are happy; they're telling friends, and people are coming back," Silveri says.

Best Fine Dining **Carnegie House**

Dinner at the Carnegie House restaurant is a little like what it would be if you had a chef in your own home. Guests are ushered from the front door not directly to a table, but to the lush and quiet library where they can talk over drinks and hors d'oeuvres before dinner. "It's quite different from anything else in town," says manager Sam Glasgow. That's not to de-emphasize dinner. Under chef Lisa Palermo, the menu has doubled its offerings in the past year. "I think more than anything, the main reason people come is for the food," Glasgow says.

Best Value Restaurant **Rey Azteca**



Best New Restaurant **TIE: Sakura Sushi and Asian Cuisine and Cracker Barrel**

Best Kids Menu **McDonald's**

Congratulations to **Jim Eberly** of Lemont, who was randomly selected from everyone who filled out a ballot in the 2011 Best of State College survey to receive a gift basket generously donated by **Tait Farm**. Thanks to everyone who filled out a ballot this year.

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