



DECADENT DISH *awards*



THE TASTIEST TIME OF YEAR IS HERE!

There are more categories and more personalities than ever on this year's Decadent Dish list. See if your favorite restaurant is making the Valley a tastier place to live!

by meghan decker and lisa j. gotto | photography by alison conklin

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Tapas on Main

favorite new

Every once in awhile, a restaurant opens in the Lehigh Valley that is so different from its culinary neighbors, so exciting, that it creates a growing buzz and stands out from the rest. Such is the case with our winner of Favorite New, Tapas on Main.

Restaurateur and Chef Rafael Palomino (famous already in the Valley for opening Pacifico at the Promenade Shops) set out to create a place perfect for family and friends to gather in a warm, inviting atmosphere to enjoy a menu brimming with dishes meant to be shared. The authentic Spanish tapas burst with his signature Nuevo Latino flavors that wake up your taste buds and keep you hungry for more.

Albondigas de Cordero (lamb meatballs) and Cocas Spanish flatbread pizzas covered in mushrooms, cured meats and cheeses are among their most popular tapas, Palomino says, and the Downtown Bethlehem location "has the density to do well." Between Main Street foot traffic and word-of-mouth, Tapas on Main is poised to remain a Valley favorite for many years to come.

Tapas on Main | 500 Main St., Bethlehem | 610.868.8903 | tapasonmain.com



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Black Forest Deli

favorite deli

When Black Forest Deli owner Vica Shparber moved to the Lehigh Valley eight years ago from New Jersey to follow the job she had with Lucent, she said she loved the area but noticed one thing was missing.

"There didn't seem to be anyone offering traditional Russian or Ukrainian food here," says Shparber. It wasn't long after her realization that Shparber closed the door on her Lucent job and opened the doors to Black Forest Deli on the corner of 7th Avenue and Union Boulevard in Bethlehem.

"I wanted to share my Russian and Ukrainian culture with the Valley," she says. So, in addition to their fresh takes on deli favorites, Shparber set out to add the savory staples of her heritage to the menu: halupki, pierogies and borscht, along with other healthy, homemade options. The response, she says, was very positive as the Valley is home to a respectable population of people of Eastern European descent, not to mention all the culinarily curious out there who have not had a decent plate of haluski in some time.

Word-of-mouth really spread once Shparber enlisted the help of social media and created her now-famous Russian Dinner Nights, usually held on Thursdays. Come in and share a unique dining experience served up family style and made with love in the little neighborhood deli with heart. You won't be disappointed.



Black Forest Deli | 745 7th Ave., Bethlehem | 610.865.3036 | bethlehemedeli.com

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Yianni's Taverna & Euro Lounge



photos by brian wcislo

favorite mediterranean

This little restaurant on the corner has undergone quite the transformation over the last few years going from a friendly, but sleepy little diner-type eatery, to a first-class, must-try dining experience bursting with all the goodness of a Greek mother's kitchen. The interior has also been enhanced to reflect an ambiance of an Athenian café at midnight—so much so, you'll have to refrain from breaking plates on its rustic hardwood floor. The tables are layered in crisp white and then deep blue cloths and there are sounds of traditional Greek music piped in for your dining pleasure.

The menu offers items like souvlaki, moussaka, tzatziki and a dish known as "flaming cheese" that is highly recommended among the restaurant's regulars. To enhance your experience at Yianni's even more, they now offer a really cool way to unwind with friends for cocktails in their chic Euro Lounge, awash in white leather couches and drapes. A DJ is on the scene for special evenings when you can dance the night away, too!

Opa! Come join in on the fun!



Yianni's Taverna & Euro Lounge

3760 Old Philadelphia Pike, Bethlehem | 610.867.8821 | yiannistaverna.com

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Looper's Grille & Bar

favorite martini menu

Come in. Stay awhile. Looper's Grille & Bar didn't earn this year's distinction for having the Valley's Favorite Martini Menu without creating an inviting atmosphere. "We want people to feel comfortable. Single or married, women or men, young or old—everyone," explains owner Natalie Miller. "When you come in, we want you to feel like you belong. Like you can't wait to get here to share good news or to talk about bad news. And with all of that, we want you to have great food and drinks."

A fan of the traditional golf clubhouse (but without all of the rules), Miller set out to create a welcoming bar you don't have to be a member or a golfer to enjoy. "A Looper is another name for a golf caddy," she says. "Just the little play on golf terms was fun." This play on words carries over to the drinks, aptly named

mar-tee-nis. From a Hot Mama, to a Kentucky Tea Party, to a Smorgasm, Looper's extensive mar-tee-ni list, 550 and counting, certainly offers something for everyone.

Want to try the mar-tee-ni that's the most labor-intensive to make? Then go for the Smell My Fingers, a delightfully fragrant mix of St. Germaine, pear vodka, pear schnapps and lavender seed pods. What about the mar-tee-ni with the most ingredients? Then you'd have to try the Kick 'em to the Curb, a 12-ingredient concoction Miller guarantees will help you to get over that formerly special someone.

Looper's Grille & Bar

313 E. 3rd St., Bethlehem
610.882.2424 | loopersgrilleandbar.com



Sugar Babe Cupcakes



favorite cupcake

Just one bite and you'll understand why Sugar Babe Cupcakes has earned the Favorite Cupcake title. From a Plain Jane (a chocolate cupcake with vanilla frosting) to a Fancy Nancy (a chocolate chip cupcake with vanilla frosting), Sugar Babe Angela Malpedo has been satisfying the sweet tooth of Valley residents ever since she opened her made-to-order baked goods company last August.

Self-taught, Malpedo's love of baking began as a little girl and family and friends have been enjoying her cupcake confections for many years. But it wasn't until last summer when this life-long Bethlehem resident decided to turn her hobby into a full-time gig that she began to live out her sweet dreams. Starting a business amid a recession wasn't easy, Malpedo admits. Creating a special order business as opposed to opening a bricks-and-mortar store made it possible.

The secret to creating the perfect cupcake, she says, is finding just the right balance of a cake that's "moist, not dry, with a lot of flavor. And a frosting that's not overly sweet but complementary to the cake." Using high-quality ingredients like Madagascar vanilla, premium cocoa powder and fresh, local fruit certainly doesn't hurt either.

Not only do they taste good, but these cupcakes are also doing good, as Malpedo donates a portion of every cupcake order to a different charity every month. She always wanted to incorporate a charitable component to her business and from the beginning, she's donated her time, talents and profits to local fundraising events for the Pretty in Pink Foundation, The Coco Foundation and the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, to name a few.

Plans to leave behind her rented commercial kitchen space and open a bakery in Bethlehem are in the works, Malpedo says, because she wants to make all of her baked goods accessible to the Valley, one cupcake, cookie and muffin at a time. "I look forward to being available to everyone. Having a storefront would be the ultimate icing on the cake!"



Sugar Babe Cupcakes
610.462.0660 | sugarbabecupcakes.com

TOWN FAVORITES

Allentown Favorite: *Grille 3501*



Lehigh Valley residents continue to flock to city chic hotspot Grille 3501 for three reasons—the atmosphere, the food and the drinks. The delicious New York fusion menu includes dishes with creative combinations that are both unexpected and consistently excellent. Combine that with their ingenious Martini Sampler, a collection of four mini martinis of your choice, and it's easy to see why Grille 3501 takes this top spot, yet again, as Allentown Favorite. Grille 3501, which celebrates its tenth anniversary this month, also takes home the coveted Favorite Overall spot in this year's survey. Keep an eye out for a much-anticipated facelift this fall, from updated décor to a revamped menu (which will maintain some of the long-time popular dishes). "It's time for something new," says co-owner John Tripani.

Grille 3501 | 3501 Broadway, Allentown | 610.706.0100 | grille3501.com

Bethlehem Favorite: *Apollo Grill*

Area diners know they are in for a delicious meal every time they make a reservation at Apollo Grill, the winner of Favorite Bethlehem for the second year in a row. Easily its menu items like the Baby Lamb Chops and their Crème Brûlée of the Day that have also awarded them the distinction of Favorite Appetizer and Favorite Dessert Menu. "We're so grateful that people are spending their hard-earned money here," explains owner Dyanne Holt. "We understand that money is tight for everybody and we want to make sure that if you're dining here you're get your money's worth." Holt and her staff are always appreciative of their guests and make every effort to treat patrons to regular specials. No need to wait for Bethlehem Restaurant Week to enjoy delicious dinner specials; Apollo offers their take on the popular food event every Wednesday throughout the year, along with Skinny Cocktail Tuesdays and Therapeutic Thursdays. Approaching their 13th year, Apollo's unstuffy elegance makes it the perfect locale for an important lunch meeting, celebratory dinner or a night out just because.

Apollo Grill | 85 W. Broad St., Bethlehem | 610.865.9600 | apollogrill.com

Easton Favorite: *Valenca*

Nabbing the Favorite Easton award is Decadent Dish newcomer Valenca. Situated amid Easton's bustling downtown circle, Valenca (who also scored in the Favorite Chef category) features a menu with classics like paella and a sizzling Steak on the Stone. Thanks to Chef Steve Kershner, who joined the team in February, the menu has been kicked up a notch and has gained a reputation for affordable quality. Aside from the food, Valenca adds to Easton's respected restaurant scene for its inviting ambiance inside and on the patio. "The atmosphere is the nicest in the Lehigh Valley," owner George Meireles boasts. "People may perceive Valenca as too expensive and too stuffy; that really isn't the case. Once you come in you realize that it's very reasonably priced and it's a comfortable, family-friendly place to dine."

Valenca | 64-66 Center Square, Easton | 610.923.5142 | valencaonthesquare.com

Steve Kershner, Valenca



favorite chef

Downtown Easton eatery Valenca is certainly in good hands with Chef Steve Kershner in the kitchen. After all, serving up consistently delicious food is what Kershner is all about. Since taking the reins earlier this year, he has revived Valenca with a Mediterranean menu that has both attracted many new customers and enticed them to keep coming back.

He replaced Valenca's original Portuguese fare with a broader selection of dishes sure to satisfy even the pickiest palate. His first few months were a challenge and the revamped menu is still a work in progress, Kershner admits, but nothing he isn't used to from his decades of culinary experience. Valley residents may remember Kershner from his days at Apollo Grill in Bethlehem, where he first earned our Favorite Chef distinction in 2009.

Making his mark on Valenca's menu has resulted in dishes like the mouth-watering Risotto Balls appetizer and the Steamed Mussels and Chorizo entrée, sitting alongside their ever-popular Steak on the Stone that "you can't get anywhere else in the Lehigh Valley," he says. Never content to stay complacent, Kershner is always thinking up more ways to take Valenca's food to the next level. Keep an eye out for his new bar menu, featuring casual nibbles perfect for sharing like mini pork belly BLTs and edamame hummus. Ready to taste what all of the hype is about? Stop by; Kershner is ready. "Let us entertain you," he says.

Valenca | 64-66 Center Square, Easton
610.923.5142 | valencaonthesquare.com

Asia Oriental Cuisine



favorite asian

For the last four years, Asia Oriental Cuisine owner and executive chef Alex Zhong has been treating Valley residents to the varied tastes of Asian cuisine with an unmatched selection of classic Chinese favorites, along with a sampling of Thai, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese. It's this variety that attracts not only locals, but also "people come from New Jersey and New York City," says May Zhong, Alex's wife and business partner.

The Zhongs make every customer feel like they're at home, which is one of the reasons why they chose a converted house as the site for their second restaurant endeavor. The couple has been in the restaurant business for more than a decade, having previously owned a successful carry-out and catering business in

Saucon Valley, which they sold in 2005. "Some foods don't travel well, a sit down restaurant allows for more creativity," explains May. It's exactly this creativity that keeps customers coming back to Asia. "Customers want to be surprised," she says.

Alex prepares nearly all of the meals himself and while there are many traditional dishes on the menu, he enjoys accommodating his patrons' unique tastes. He's even named some dishes after his regulars, like "Skip Delight," a mix of shrimp, chicken and beef in black bean sauce, and "Jane's Birthday Dinner," a crispy pork served with mushrooms, carrots and a Hoisin glaze. "These dishes are popular because they're unique not just General Tso's," May says.

Asia Oriental Cuisine | 1102 E. Susquehanna St., Allentown | 610.798.7777 | asiaorientalcuisine.com

favorite middle eastern

Aci Halal Meat & Turkish Restaurant
34 N. 2nd St., Allentown
610.439.8782

favorite appetizer menu

Apollo Grill
85 W. Broad St., Bethlehem
610.865.9600 | apollogrill.com

bethlehem favorite

Apollo Grill
85 W. Broad St., Bethlehem
610.865.9600 | apollogrill.com

favorite dessert menu

Apollo Grill
85 W. Broad St., Bethlehem
610.865.9600 | apollogrill.com

favorite asian

Asia Oriental Cuisine
1102 E. Susquehanna St., Allentown
610.798.7777 | asiaorientalcuisine.com

favorite bar/tavern menu

Bethlehem Brew Works
569 Main St., Bethlehem
610.882.1300 | thebrewworks.com

favorite diner

Billy's Downtown Diner
10 E. Broad St., Bethlehem
610.867.0105 | billysdiner.com

favorite deli

Black Forest Deli
745 7th Ave., Bethlehem
610.865.3036 | bethlehemedeli.com

favorite wine list

Blue Grillhouse & Wine Bar
4431 Easton Ave., Bethlehem
610.691.8400 | bluegrillhouse.com

favorite café

Blue Sky Café
22 W. 4th St., Bethlehem
610.867.9390 | theblueskycafe.com

favorite special occasion

Bolete
1740 Seidersville Rd., Bethlehem
610.868.6505 | boleterestaurant.com

favorite farm-to-table

Bolete
1740 Seidersville Rd., Bethlehem
610.868.6505 | boleterestaurant.com

favorite cheesesteak

The Brass Rail Restaurant
3015 Lehigh St., Allentown
610.797.1927 | brassrailrestaurant.com

favorite mexican

Cactus Blue
2915 Schoenersville Rd., Bethlehem
610.814.3000 | cactusblue.biz

favorite vegetarian

Cali Burrito
3104 Hamilton Blvd., Allentown
610.351.1791 | caliburrito.com

favorite burger

Five Guys Burgers and Fries
4025 W. Tilghman St., Allentown
914 Airport Center Dr., Allentown
610.336.9315 | 610.266.5135
fiveguys.com

favorite country inn

Glasbern Inn
2141 Packhouse Rd., Fogelsville
610.285.4723 | glasbern.com

allentown favorite

Grille 3501
3501 Broadway, Allentown
610.706.0100 | grille3501.com

favorite overall

Grille 3501
3501 Broadway, Allentown
610.706.0100 | grille3501.com

favorite seafood

Henry's Salt Of The Sea
1926 W. Allen St., Allentown
610.434.2628

favorite brunch

Historic Hotel Bethlehem
437 Main St., Bethlehem
610.625.5000 | hotelbethlehem.com

favorite chinese

Hunan Springs
4939 Hamilton Blvd., Wescosville
610.366.8338 | hunansprings.com

favorite foodie

(caterer or local food expert)
Karen Hunter
Catering By Karen Hunter
1075 S. Main St., Coopersburg
610.770.1300 | karenhuntercatering.com

favorite chef

Steve Kershner | Valenca
64-66 Center Square, Easton
610.923.5142 | valencaonthesquare.com

favorite japanese

Kome
2880 Center Valley Parkway
610.798.9888 | komerestaurant.com

favorite martini menu

Loopers Grille And Bar
313 E. 3rd St., Bethlehem
610.882.2424 | loopersgrilleandbar.com

neighborhood favorite

Machs Gute
713 Linden St., Bethlehem
610.866.3311

favorite italian

Mama Nina Focaccheria
546 Main St., Bethlehem
610.867.9802 | maminina.com

favorite french

Manor House Inn
4508 Old Bethlehem Pike, Center Valley
610.865.8166 | manor-house-inn.com

favorite atmosphere

Melt
2805 Center Valley Parkway
610.798.9000 | meltgrill.com

favorite indian

Nawab Indian Restaurant
13 E. 4th St., Bethlehem
610.691.0388 | nawabcuisine.com

favorite pizza

Sette Luna
219 Ferry St., Easton
610.253.8888 | setteluna.com

favorite steakhouse

Shula's Steak House
2960 Center Valley Parkway,
Center Valley
610.841.5600 | donshula.com

favorite cupcakes

Sugar Babe Cupcakes
610.462.0660 | sugarbavecupcakes.com

favorite new

Tapas On Main
500 Main St., Bethlehem
610.868.8903 | tapasonmain.com

favorite thai

Thai Thai II
509 Main St., Bethlehem
610.868.1919

easton favorite

Valenca
64-66 Center Square, Easton
610.923.5142 | valencaonthesquare.com

favorite mediterranean

Yianni's Taverna & Euro Lounge
3760 Old Philadelphia Pike, Bethlehem
610.867.8821 | yiannistaverna.com



Which Decadent Dish
winner provided us with
some festive cocktail recipes
for your holiday parties?

Find out online at
lehighvalleystyle.com.



Karen Hunter

favorite foodie

So just who is Karen Hunter? We hear her name often at social events invariably when a guest asks, "Who did the food?" This is usually preceded by comments such as: "This is delicious," and "Oh, my goodness—this sauce is to die for."

When we caught up with Hunter in her cozy Coopersburg catering kitchen, she was busily preparing for the opening of the new and improved café space at the Allentown Art Museum scheduled to make its debut December 1.

Hunter, an Allentown native, has been the exclusive caterer for the AAM for many years and is currently designing an upscale grab-and-go menu for hungry museum visitors who stop at the café.

A self-taught chef, Hunter started out in the early '80s reading cookbooks and developing recipes for one-of-kind hors d'oeuvres. "I love to make hors d'oeuvres; some caterers don't because they are so labor intensive," she says. And it just may be these magnificent little mouthfuls that have set her apart from the rest of the culinary crowd. If you have ever tasted her Crab Madeleines, you know exactly what we are talking about.

Hunter also developed her palate-pleasing reputation as premier caterer for Sayre Mansion in Bethlehem. "I never expected the business to be all that it is now," says Hunter, who remarked appropriately enough that her best advertisement has always been word of mouth.

When asked about her elusive nature, Hunter replied: "I believe my place is in the kitchen ensuring that all the food that goes out is up to our standards." She is also very adamant about the role her staff and the public plays in the business's success. "It isn't just me," says Hunter who works side-by-side with her sister, Mary, her mother, an excellent support staff and exceptional chefs.

"I am also so grateful to the community for hiring us and letting me do what I love to do."



Karen Hunter | 107 S. Main St., Coopersburg | 610.770.1300 | karenhuntercatering.com