

BEST BEER SELECTION

EL BAIT SHOP

Continuing to keep the crown above their head, el Bait Shop reigns supreme. But was there any doubt? Not only do they have the best beer selection in town, but the entire state. With more than 100 beers on tap and more than 100 different bottled brands, there is something for everybody. Stop in on Thursdays for the "Jimmy Carter Happy Hour," which features free samples from home brewers. The vast selection of beer draws you in, but their simple, yet tasty menu fills your belly. 200 S.W. 2nd St., Des Moines, 284-1970.

Runners-up: Old Chicago, Raccoon River Brewing Co.

BEST MICROBREWED BEER

RACCOON RIVER BREWING CO.

Raccoon River fans have spoken. For the second year in a row, Raccoon River has been voted Best Microbrewed Beer. They offer a wide variety of beers including Tallgrass Light, Homestead Re-4id, Bandit IPA, Vanilla Cream Ale and Stonecutter Stout. If those tasty treats don't do it for you, try one of their 14 seasonal beers throughout the year. 200 10th St., Des Moines, 362-5222.

Runners-up: Court Ave. Brewing Co., Olde Main Brewing Co.

BEST POWER LUNCH

CENTRO

This place already had star-power as a favorite with downtown businessmen, visiting celebs and politicians, particularly Democrats who also had a winning year. The emergence of Gateway Park puts it over the top as it unseats Palmer's in this category. 1011 Locust St., Des Moines, 244-7033.

Runners-up: Palmer's, Nick's Bar & Grill

BEST PLACE FOR A \$5 LUNCH

TASTY TACOS

This longtime favorite of legislators and other bargain hunters serves a familiar Mexican-American menu. What separates it from the pack, while inspiring a cult following among several generations of Iowans, are its unique taco shells that include one partially fried shell that has proven to have addictive properties. Multiple locations.

Runners-up: High Life Lounge, El Rodeo

BEST PLACE FOR A \$10 DINNER

EL RODEO

El Rodeo repeats as champ here. While others might offer cheaper dinners, no one offers so many choices for less than \$10. Which leaves room for some south of the Border cocktails. Multiple locations.

Runners-up: Gateway Market Cafe, A Dong

BEST PLACE TO CHOW AFTER 2 A.M.

BIG TOMATO

From the bars' last call in the wee morning 'til near dawn, repeat champion Big Tomato offers pizza by the slice. Their simple little walk-up counter has become the most frequently suggested direction when bar bouncers

need to point people to the exits come closing time.

But unlike other half-way houses between taverns and after-hours parties, Big Tomato actually serves great pies. 2613 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines, 288-7227.

Runners-up: Perkins, El Rey

BEST FIRST DATE SPOT

MARS CAFÉ

First dates are usually awkward, so readers agreed that a café is better place to get acquainted with your new suitor than dinner or a movie. Mars Café has it all: coffee, tea, wine and beer. And don't worry if you're hungry, because they serve sandwiches, salads, soups and desserts. Everything is reasonably priced, which is nice on a first date. They also host live music to fill those awkward silences. 2318 University Ave., Des Moines, 369-MARS.

Runners-up: Black Cat Café, Centro

BEST PATIO

CABARET WEST GLEN

Anyone and everyone knows that the environment at a bar is what makes it comfortable. And for Cabaret West Glen, it's all about the environment inside and outside. While most local bars have outdoor patios that can only be used during warm weather, this west side bar has an indoor patio that can delight all. Mix in cheap drinks, a variety of music and some nice eye candy, and you'll be staying until they say "Last Call." 560 S. Prairie View Drive, West Des Moines, 225-1105.

Runners-up: Dos Rios, Wellman's Pub

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