

BEST of FOOD + DRINK

And it would take a whole hymnal to sing the praises of the milkshakes, both hard *and* soft.

2nd: **BRGR**, East Liberty and Cranberry
3rd: **Tessaro's**, Bloomfield

BEST PIZZA

MINEO'S PIZZA HOUSE

2128 Murray Ave., Squirrel Hill
(412-521-9864) / 713A Washington Road, Mount Lebanon (412-344-9467)
www.mineospizza.com

Americans seem sharply divided over almost everything nowadays: Even arguments about pizza can lead to an exchange of blows, or the shutting-down of national parks. Yet at times, a consensus emerges: Mineo's, established in 1958 and still family-owned, has won this category four of the past five years. With all due respect to partisans on the other side, the people have spoken.

2nd: **Fiori's**, Beechview
3rd: **Pizza Sola**, multiple locations

BEST WINGS

QUAKER STEAK & LUBE

Multiple locations,
www.quakersteakandlube.com

Sport-eaters no doubt love the challenge implicit in this regionally founded restaurant chain's Triple Atomic Wings, advertised as "Guts, Glory, Pain!" But even descending the heat scale on this gas-station-themed outlet's menu, there's plenty to choose from. Quaker Steak has 21-plus kinds of wing, including Buckeye Barbecue, Golden Garlic, Dusted Mango Habanero and Dusted Tex Mex Ranch.

2nd: **Big Shot Bob's House of Wings**, Avalon and Coraopolis
3rd: **Fat Heads Saloon**, South Side

BEST LATE-NIGHT MENU

EAT'N PARK

Multiple locations,
www.eatnpark.com

After a night on the town, how about a Basket of Loaded Fries (bacon bits, cheddar sauce, southwest seasoning)? This venerable regional chain — boasting

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La Gourmandine co-owner and baker Fabien Moreau, and one of his creations, a raspberry and chocolate pastry (inset)



(PHOTOS BY HEATHER MULL)



BEST DESSERTS

LA GOURMANDINE BAKERY

4605 Butler St., Lawrenceville
412-682-2210 or www.lagourmandinebakery.com

(BY JESSICA SERVER)

CONSIDER THIS the next time you find yourself trapped in traffic outside a tunnel: Road congestion can change your life. That's what happened to Fabien and Lisanne Moreau, owners of La Gourmandine. If they hadn't gotten stuck in traffic back in their

former home of Toulouse, France, their Butler Street French pastry shop may never have existed,

"One day we were in traffic, just sitting there," says Fabien, a Paris native. Traffic jams were a daily occurrence, but this one

sparked what he says was a "crazy idea."

"We said to each other, 'Should we try to go to the U.S.?' ...We just said, 'Yeah, why not? Let's try it.'"

Soon after, in 2006, the pair arrived in Pittsburgh, where Lisanne had family.

Fabien worked in kitchens from Olive Garden to Eleven, but found it hard to find some of the desserts he could get in France. A French bakery seemed like a natural business opportunity — but first Fabien would need to become an actual French baker.

He returned to study at the Lenôtre School in Paris. "Mr. Lenôtre was classic in his food," with an emphasis on consistency

and traditional flavors, remembers Fabien. "I'm trying to reproduce the flavor that I had in France, because I miss my country, my food."

When the bakery finally opened, in June 2010, Lawrenceville embraced it. From the Toulouse-inspired exposed-brick wall to the menu of elaborate desserts, Danishes and fresh-baked breads, La Gourmandine is meant to recreate the feel of neighborhood bakeries found throughout France. (Although in France, a bakery this size wouldn't have any seating.)

So what on the menu appealed to *City Paper* readers' sweet tooth? Breads and Danishes aside, each day brings 12 pastries, from French classics like *éclairs au chocolate* and *macarons*, to the seasonal and unique, such as autumn's apple-based *feuilleté aux pommes*, and *tartelette à la citrouille* (pumpkin tart).

When asked how he creates new recipes, Fabien demurs. "I never create a recipe," he insists. Relying on centuries-old techniques, "I just assemble, and put things together."

His knack for "putting things together" has the shop bustling, even at 3:30 p.m. on a Tuesday afternoon, as loyal customers purchase almond croissants or a baguette for dinner. At La Gourmandine, high-quality ingredients (some imported from France) mix well with classical training and a dash of creativity to keep you coming back.

So, it's a dream come true, right? "I think it's dangerous for restaurants to be a lifelong dream," Fabien warns. "I love what I'm doing, I love food. But people ask, 'Is the bakery your baby?' and I say, 'No, I have two babies at home.'"

Not that you should worry about the Moreaus abandoning Lawrenceville any time soon. After all, Fabien says, "at 4 in the morning" — when he and his wife drive in to the bakery — "there is no traffic."

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