



Valley's Best FOOD & DRINK

April 26, 2009

## Winners mark trend of largely local favorites

### Caruso's, Kwan's, Alessandro's, Word of Mouth top list

By Sheldon Traver • Special to the Statesman Journal

When it comes to dining in the Mid-Willamette Valley, Statesman Journal readers logged on en masse to showcase many of the best places to eat. From tenderloin to French toast, a variety of restaurants new and old earned the title of the Best of the Mid-Valley. Some reached people's hearts in one or two categories; others, such as Caruso's Italian Cafe in Keizer, swept through the competition, which some said was a reflection of both good food and good service. When Jerry Phipps, the owner and executive chef at Caruso's, learned the restaurant was selected as the Overall Best Restaurant in the Mid-Valley, he said he was stunned and pleased at the same time. "It's awesome that people obviously like what we are doing," he said. "We're honored that people hold us in such high regard. It shows that we really value the people and not just the meal. "In addition to being first in the overall category, Caruso's was also first for Best Italian, Best Place to Impress a First Date and Best Romantic Dinner. The restaurant offers a wide variety of traditional Italian dishes and gourmet specialties, such as beef tenderloin medallions with gorgonzola or a veal shank with risotto. Phipps admitted he couldn't suggest any particular entrée for a first-time diner. "That would be really hard for me," he said with a laugh. "They're all my babies."

#### ★ 2009 WINNERS ★

##### Best Overall Restaurant

###### TOP PICK

Caruso's Italian Cafe

###### LOCAL FAVORITES

Alessandro's Ristorante & Galleria  
Willamette Valley Grill

##### Best Appetizers

###### TOP PICK

Alessandro's Ristorante & Galleria

###### LOCAL FAVORITES

Caruso's Italian Cafe  
Original Roadhouse Grill

##### Best Italian

###### TOP PICK

Caruso's Italian Cafe

###### LOCAL FAVORITES

Alessandro's Ristorante & Galleria  
Olive Garden

##### Best Dessert

###### TOP PICK

Gerry Frank's Konditorei

###### LOCAL FAVORITES

Alessandro's Ristorante & Galleria  
Caruso's Italian Cafe

##### Best Place to Impress a First Date

###### TOP PICK

Caruso's Italian Cafe

###### LOCAL FAVORITES

Alessandro's Ristorante & Galleria  
Kwan's Original Cuisine

##### Best New Restaurant

###### TOP PICK

Word of Mouth Neighborhood Bistro

###### LOCAL FAVORITES

Willamette Valley Grill  
Caruso's Italian Cafe

##### Best Romantic Dinner

###### TOP PICK

Caruso's Italian Cafe

###### LOCAL FAVORITES

Alessandro's Ristorante & Galleria  
Willamette Valley Grill

##### Best Outdoor Dining

###### TOP PICK

The Ram

###### LOCAL FAVORITES

Caruso's Italian Cafe  
Best Little Roadhouse

