

BEST "BIZ LUNCHES" IN REGION 2000



By: Food Critic, Frank Britt,
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Yes, I do like to eat out. And I do almost every day. When Dan Smith, the editor of BRBJ asked if I would write an article on the "best restaurants for business lunches" in Region 2000, I told him I could not do it. But...I would write something on my "personal favorites". Of course, that's the "best" to me, and my list may change just like the weather. There are new restaurants opening up almost daily it seems, but I keep going back to the locally owned ones below.

Here are my choices in alphabetical order. They are not ranked because each is unique in its own way.* See end of this article for Dan's and my criteria

CHINA ROYAL

Location: 205 Gristmill Dr, Forest (Next to Graves Mill Shopping Center)

This was the best keep secret in Forest until Areva discovered it. Always busy, but you never have to wait more than a minute to get a good seat. China Royal has quick and efficient service and the buffet is so varied you could eat there every day and have something different. I actually took different clients there three times in one week! The atmosphere is very airy and I normally try to get one of the booths overlooking the pond outside that has ducks scattering around (not on the menu!). If you are a sushi lover, there is a separate sushi bar. Everything is always fresh and steaming on the buffet from the pork, chicken, beef and seafood selections to the vegetables. Alcoholic beverages available. Try China Royal and you'll return soon. (That was the note on my fortune cookie!)

THE DEPOT GRILLE

Location: Downtown Lynchburg (10 Ninth Street)

Owner and Manager: Dave Poole and Dan Cooper

Now this is a fun place that is been welcomed by not only the Downtown businesses but the residential folks as well. A concept restaurant, but not overly done. Having the train come by while enjoying a casual lunch is a Lynchburg experience, especially if you are entertaining someone from out of town. The high ceilings and big windows give an ambiance of an old train station, yet at the same time the openness is easy for the wait staff to maneuver from the well designed kitchen to serve the customers. You can eat at the bar, booths or tables. A wide variety of items are on the menu but I keep going back to my two favorites: 1) the fried oysters are without a doubt the best I've ever had and this includes seafood restaurants at the beach. Light, crisp, prepared with a "three dipping" process and a generous serving. 2) The pork ribs are slow baked for seven hours and the meat literally falls off the bones. The Depot Grille was not slow to catch on. Word got out quickly. Make it your next stop if you want to enjoy a place where the downtown business people congregate.

ISABELLA'S ITALIAN TRATTORIA... *and*

MERIWETHER'S MARKET RESTAURANT

Owner/Manager: Meriwether-Godsey:

**Locations: Forest Plaza West Shopping Center and Boonsboro Shopping Center
Respectively**

Truly Region 2000's most beautiful restaurants. It's difficult for me to say which I like better. Meriwether's is near where I live and Isabella's is near to where I work. Both restaurants are owned and managed by Meriwether-Godsey, providing top-quality dining service management and related services to locations around the state of Virginia and beyond.

The atmosphere in Meriwether's Market Restaurant is conducive to enjoyable dining and entertaining. Meriwether's typifies the casual gourmet attitude with large whimsical murals on the walls, framed sketches of locals, and artfully decorated. The bar and wait staff are professional and knowledgeable, the kitchen is state of the art and you simply cannot get a bad meal there. Meriwether's has an excellent selection of wines from around the world. Two of my lunch choices are the Roasted Red Pepper and Crab Soup and the Dried Cranberry Salad (with Smithfield Ham!); however the daily specials are always very hard to pass up. There's a private dining room for lunch meetings and small parties. Meriwether's also does excellent catering for businesses.

From first glance Isabella's could be in San Francisco or New York, but it's tucked away in Forest Brook Shopping center on "Restaurant Row" where there are several other good choices to dine. The atmosphere is so immediately friendly that it encourages good conversation the minute you sit down at your table. Everything is beautifully presented and the selection of food with Northern Italian flair makes you wonder how they can prepare it all so quickly. Their Signature Panini sandwiches and Tuscan salads will rival the best you'll find anywhere.

THE MAIN STREET EATERY

Chef /Proprietor: Urs Gabathuler

Location: Downtown Lynchburg (907 Main Street)

Are you in Downtown Lynchburg...or are you in a European bistro?

If you want a good dining experience with a business acquaintance, this is the place to come Downtown. The Main Street Eatery is owned by Urs Gabathuler who is also the Chef. His specialties that I always order are the Swiss and German foods, but his seafood dishes and crepes are also on my recommended list. Try their Virginia wines featuring Kluge Estates as well as other fine Virginia brands. Since Urs is an award winning pastry chef, I can't leave without viewing and sampling from the wide variety of fresh delicacies on the dessert cart. The service is always excellent and when you leave, your guest(s) will thank you for such a pleasant dining experience. We are truly fortunate to have such a fine restaurant with reasonable prices in our area. This is also one of our favorite places for dinner.

NEIGHBOR'S PLACE

Chef/Manager: Alex Richardson

Location: Wyndhurst

This place is so good that it could be the beginning of a national chain. Great for lunch, great for dinner. Alex Richardson is an extremely talented and creative entrepreneur and chef. Everything is fresh and made from scratch. I usually order the daily specials because I want to see what Alex and his young and energetic staff have created. The Bar area is fun, the main dining area is open and airy, yet there are booths to carry on business conversations without distractions. Like Al Fresco dining? Well, you can eat outside almost nine months out of the year. Neighbor's Place also has a small conference room suitable for twenty or thirty people. My favorites are the big salads and hearty soups offered daily. My biggest

problem with Neighbors Place? There are so many choices; I recently wasted a good business conversation talking about Alex's menu. That's what I call a "good problem".

THE SILVER PIG

Chef /Owner: Jim Moore

Location: Madison Heights

Yes, Barbeque! (or Bar-B-Que, BBQ). I told Jim Moore, the owner, recently that if I didn't get my "Silver Pig fix" pretty soon I'd probably sink into a deep deprivation depression (DDD). This is the real stuff! Eastern North Carolina style hot pepper vinegar-basted-slow-cooked pork loin barbeque. I've heard your taste buds have better memories than the other four senses (sight, smell, hearing and feeling) and can still remember this exact same kind of barbeque as a child growing up in Eastern North Carolina. You can get it by the plate with the Silver Pig signature original hush puppies with honey on the side and Cole slaw; or you can get the sandwiches. One sandwich is enough but I usually get two. Try a little Brunswick stew as a side and top it off with the fresh peach cobbler. Talk about a "taste sensation", the Silver Pig is it. I even had a business friend drive all the way from Richmond a few months ago just to meet me at the Silver Pig for lunch. And if you want to have a fun party, get the Silver Pig to cater it for you. Oink!! Sorry, bon appetit!

The Region 2000 area is fortunate to have so many really good locally owned eateries that specialize in serving good lunchtime fare. A few others that I enjoy are: Shakers (River Ridge Mall); Charlie's (Graves mill Road); Milano's Italian Restaurant (Boonsboro Road); Montebello (Rt. 221 Forest); The Jazz Street Grill (Forest Plaza West Shopping Center); Bedford Station, (Bedford); Shad's (Rivermont Avenue); Magnolia Foods (Rivermont Avenue); La Plaza Allege (Main Street); and La Carreta (Timberlake Road):

***Criteria: Locally owned and managed within the Region 2000 area; good atmosphere for business lunches; consistently good food; fast service, reasonable prices; easy and accessible parking; clean kitchen. (Alcoholic beverages available at all restaurants but The Silver Pig).**

About "the critic": Frank Britt is president of Britt Marketing, since 1981, a full service marketing, advertising and PR firm in Forest. Britt Marketing will announce soon that it will be launching a new magazine, *The Official Virginia Wine Lover*, in the first quarter of 2006.

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