

# ORLANDO Business Journal

## Reader's Choice Awards

orlandobizjournals.com

# CENTRAL FLORIDA'S BEST

Orlando Business Journal readers choose top dogs in 51 categories

By ROBYN SIDERSKY

The 2008 presidential election must have put *Orlando Business Journal* readers in a voting mood as they turned out in droves to make their voices heard for their favorite places and things in town.

Nearly four times as many nominations were received this year for readers' favorite foods, meeting spots, places to stay and where to do business.

The ballots may have been more numerous than in previous years, but readers again gave their nod to mostly local companies when picking the best of the best.

Some readers thought so much of some home-grown firms that they nominated them in several categories. Enzian Theater and Darden Restaurants walked off with the top honors in three different categories.

Of course, our readers also showed their humorous side when submitting nominations. One reader suggested a Wal-Mart near Kissimmee for a new

hairdo, while another suggested that the best places to hold a hush-hush meeting was in Ocala and Detroit. Some readers like to keep the rest of us guessing and just wouldn't give up their secret spots.

Repeat winners from past years included Darden Restaurants, Fannie Hillman & Associates, **Pohl & Short**, Fields BMW, Dubsdread Country Club, First Watch, the Cheesecake Factory, Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center, Starbucks, Del Frisco's Prime Steak & Lobster and Infusion Tea.

There also were several newcomers to the list, including Little & Associates, Performance Construction Group, Turner Construction Co., Yawn Design Studio Inc., Bishop Realty & Development LLC, Firehouse Subs, Seito Sushi, The Basket Case and Stella Luca Salon.

### R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Larry Tobin, president of Fairwinds Credit Union, took the prize for most respected executive in Central Florida.

Darden Restaurants, known for its philanthropic efforts locally, was named best corporate citizen and best large company. Darden, also dubbed the most underrated company, owns Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze, Capital Grille, Seasons 52 and Longhorn Steakhouse.

### THE PLACE YOU CALL HOME

If your current place of residence isn't meeting your needs, *OBJ* readers recommend Little Diversified Architectural Consulting for the best architect in Orlando. Headquartered in Charlotte, N.C., its Orlando office is on South Orange Avenue.

Engle Homes Orlando Inc., which sold 443 local homes last year for a total of \$194.2 million, and Hage Construction Co., which touts itself as a builder of "affordable luxury homes," tied for best residential construction company. Phil Kean Designs Inc. of Winter Park, which closed on \$10.1 million in custom home sales last year, and David Weekley Homes of Altamonte

Springs tied for best custom homebuilder.

After you've built your new home or office, use Yawn Design Studio Inc. of Winter Park, voted best interior design firm, to plan your space and all its finishes, and help you choose and arrange your furniture.

When you decide to sell your home, call repeat winner Fannie Hillman & Associates Inc., named best residential real estate office, to put it on the market.

## FOR THE PLACE YOU CALL WORK

Maybe you want a new office built or your existing one renovated. Performance Construction Group in Sanford, which specializes in interior buildouts and exterior renovations, tied with the 106-year-old, New Your City-based Turner Construction Co. for best commercial construction firm.

Or call Bishop Realty & Development LLC on Edgewater Drive in Orlando, named best commercial real estate firm, to help you find a place to buy or lease.

## LET'S MEET

For the best hotel for large meetings, go to the 1,400-room Gaylord Palms Resort, which opened about 10 miles east of Kissimmee in 2002 and has 400,000 square feet of meeting space.

For a more intimate gathering, readers prefer Central Florida's only full-time, nonprofit cinema, the Enzian Theater, also named best small company and best place for a hush-hush meeting. In

mid-October, it opened a new 70-seat outdoor bar and restaurant, Eden Bar, featuring authentic Viennese specialties.

## SAVING FOR THE FUTURE

*OBJ* readers suggested you trust SunTrust Bank and Bank of America, Central Florida's two largest banks, with your firm's hard-earned dollars, naming them both best business bank.

SunTrust had \$6.9 billion in Central Florida deposits as of June 30, closely followed by Bank of America's \$5.6 billion, according to the FDIC.

Oviedo-based Citizens Bank of Florida, which had \$215.8 million in deposits as of June 30, was your choice for best community bank.

Fairwinds Credit Union, Central Florida's second-largest credit union with \$1.8 billion in assets, was the winner for Best Credit Union with an overwhelming number of votes, thanks to an ingenious in-house campaign that involved setting up kiosks in all its branches and asking customers if they wanted to vote.

## PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

**Pohl & Short PA, a self-described "business boutique law firm" founded in 1993 in Winter Park, got the top nod for best small law firm. It does corporate law, tax and estate planning, construction law, probate, bankruptcy and litigation.**

Lowndes, Drosdick, Doster, Kantor & Reed PA, Central Florida's largest law firm with 134 in-house attorneys, was named best large law firm. The full-

service firm concentrates on real estate business, corporate law, litigation and wealth management.

The award for best accounting firm went to Graham, Cottrill, Jackson & Hostetter LLP, founded in Orlando in 1975. Its services include audits, tax planning, business advice, estate planning and more for a wide range of clients, including car dealers, banks, construction firms, manufacturers, health care providers, schools, software firms and securities dealers.

## PAMPER YOURSELF

As the year winds down and the holiday season begins, everyone should find some time to relax, whether it be through retail therapy or by getting a massage. The Ritz-Carnton Orlando Grande Lakes was voted best spa by a landslide. There, you can get facials, massages, manicures, pedicures, peels and more – even a \$3,000 Autumn Sensation Retreat that includes a chauffeured ride from your home, a spa butler, lunch, four hours of the spa treatments of your choice, champagne and a personalized robe, all in your own spa suite for the day with a private verandah overlooking the citrus gardens.

While the ladies are at the spa, the gentlemen may prefer to head to the links at Interlachen Country Club in Winter Park, named the best private golf club, or the 84-year-old newly renovated Dubsdread Golf Course on West Par Street in Orlando, named the best public golf course.

And for a weekend getaway, check into the Grand Bohemian Hotel in downtown Orlando, named Central

Florida's best hotel, which is owned by hotelier Richard Kessler.

While we're on the topic of self-indulgence, start planning where you'll get a makeover. The ladies like Stella Luca Salon's two locations in Winter Park the best. The men prefer Kennedy's All-American Barber Club (formerly Carr's), which offers a straight razor shave and haircuts, and is co-owned by Chris Hurn, CEO of Mercantile Commercial Capital.

For a new wardrobe, *OBJ* readers recommend Macy's and Ann Taylor, which tied as the best place to shop for woman's business clothing, and John Craig Clothier, named the best spot for men.

Does your new look include a new set of wheels? *OBJ* readers suggest you try Don Reid Ford on South Orlando Avenue in Maitland for an American car and Fields BMW on Wymore Road in Winter Park for a foreign automobile. Fields BMW is part of the Chicago-based Fields Auto Group, which has dealerships in Florida, Illinois, Wisconsin and British Columbia, Canada.

If you're in need of a gift for someone other than yourself, go to The Basket Case on Vineland Road in Orlando, which touts itself as "the gourmet alternative to sending flowers." *OBJ* readers named it the best place to get a gift basket.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

When it comes to mealtime, Orlando businesspeople are all over the map. For power lunches, Houston's Restaurant in Winter Park – with its

fabulous view of Lake Killarney – and Panera Bread Co., with nine area locations, tied for the win.

First Watch, with five area locations, reigned in both the power breakfast and best brunch categories. Infusion Tea on Edgewater Drive in College Park and inside Thornton Park's Urban Think bookstore was named Central Florida's best tea shop, as well as the best place to go for vegetarian food. Del Frisco's Prime Steak & Lobster on Lee Road in Winter Park was voted as the place with the best steak in town.

The coffee of choice remains Starbucks, even though the firm is closing 600 of its locations nationwide. The locations near some readers must've closed – a handful said they prefer Maxwell House or Folgers.

Cheesecake Factory – with locations at the Mall at Millenia and in Winter Park Village – took the cake for best dessert, but close behind it were The Dessert Lady and The Melting Pot.

If sushi is more your thing, try Seito Sushi at one of its three locations in Winter Park, Celebration and Baldwin Park. No time for a sit-down meal? Our readers liked Outback Steakhouse, with 11 area locations, best for takeout food.

To impress someone, go to Seasons 52 on Sand Lake Road in Orlando or East Altamonte Drive in Altamonte Springs, which got the nod for its wine list and was named best place to have dinner with a client.

For a more casual lunch, try one of Firehouse Subs' 24 area locations, which got your vote for best sandwich.

Barbecue lovers should give one of Bubbalou's Bodacious BBQ's five area locations a shot – our readers recommend them over everyone else.

## THE BEST OF THE AIRWAVES: LOCAL TV AND RADIO

For many readers, their choice of TV news is based on which anchors they like best. Jacqueline London, of Local 6 WKMG, and Martie Salt, of Channel 9 WFTV, tied for best local female TV personality. Bob Opsahl, of WFTV, was voted best male TV personality.

*OBJ* readers' favorite male personality on the radio is Scott McKenzie, of MIX 105.1-FM. Right behind him was Johnny, of XL 106.7-FM. His on-air partner, Jayde, was runner-up for best local female radio personality, second to Erica Lee of MIX 105.1-FM. McKenzie and Lee have been hosting the morning show for more than 18 years together.

Living in Florida brings us plenty of weather concerns, so we care about who gives us the weather forecast. Tom Terry of WFTV overwhelmingly took this category. Congrats, Tom – you've got a serious following.

