

BEST OF BALLOT WINNERS

First Place (Two nights at the Park Hyatt Chicago): **Henry Goudsmit, Deerfield.**

Second Place (Two dinner cruises for two on the Odyssey Cruise line):

Muriel Footlik, Northbrook and Mike Holub, Arlington Heights.

\$100 ABT gift certificate: Roberta O. Siegfried, Evanston.

Auto-detailed package from Evanston Car Wash: Mary Siebel, Evanston.

Day pass for four on Chicago Trolley Tours: Jennifer Revis, Libertyville.

Wildlife \$25 certificate: Diane Orndt, Northfield; Gene Prufan, Des Plaines and Kristin Schwaner, Park Ridge.

Best Local Orchestra: CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

220 S. MICHIGAN AVE., CHICAGO, 312/294-3333

It should come as no surprise that the internationally lauded CSO topped this category. But what's impressive was the range of votes we received: fans wrote in about the Northbrook Symphony (which came in second place), the Evanston Symphony, the Lake Forest Symphony, the Highland Park Strings, and even the orchestra at New Trier High School. So head downtown for the CSO if you want — but remember you've got plenty of options closer to home.

Best Chocolatier: LONG GROVE CONFECTIONERY CO.

333 LEXINGTON DRIVE, BUFFALO GROVE, 847/459-3100 OR 800/373-3102

LOCATIONS ALSO IN WILMETTE, GLENVIEW AND DOWNTOWN CHICAGO

In 1975, John Mangell II bought an old red school house in Long Grove and started selling peanut brittle, fudge and salt water taffy. Then he wowed his customers with chocolate covered strawberries. Hiring the consultant who created the Frango Mint, Long Grove Confectionery came up with recipes for sweets such as the trademark Myrtle (pecans smothered in caramel and chocolate). "We use top quality chocolate, a blend of milk and dark chocolate created for us by Blommer's Chocolate," Mangell says. Long Grove Confectionery also uses whipping cream and butter in its recipes, which explains why the chocolate strawberries continue to have such a luscious reputation.

Best view of the lake: THE SIGNATURE ROOM AT THE 95TH

(JOHN HANCOCK CENTER), 875 N. MICHIGAN AVE., CHICAGO, 312/787-9596

"It's the perfect place to go if you have out-of-town visitors and want to treat them to lunch," says reader Hy Speck of Skokie. "On a clear day, you can go on the observation deck, one floor above the Signature Room restaurant, and see almost four states from up there. A lunch is not too expensive, maybe \$12 to \$15. The dinner is expensive, but when the lights go down and the city comes up, it's just gorgeous."

Best caterer: CATERING BY MICHAEL'S

6203 PARK AVE., MORTON GROVE, 847/966-6555

"My husband broke his shoulder and was stuck in the house for three weeks, so we had a lot of time to eat," says reader Lois Dolnick of Northbrook. "We ordered just about everything: chicken piccata, roast brisket of beef, fruit platters, oven-roasted potatoes. You name it, we had it. I recommend the Caesar salad to everyone I know."

Best theater concession: REGAL LINCOLNSHIRE 20 & IMAX THEATER

300 PARKWAY DRIVE, LINCOLNSHIRE, 847/229-9100

"I like their attention to service, and that the concession stand is always so clean," says reader Rodi Glass of Highland Park.

"I go to the movies at least once a month. I don't do a whole meal or

anything, but I like their coffee — the plain decaf of the day. My grandchildren always go for the popcorn, which comes in big portions. No real bells and whistles, it's just good stuff."

Best tea spot: THE DRAKE HOTEL

140 E. WALTON PLACE, CHICAGO, 312/787-2200

"Over the last few years, going to The Drake has become a Christmas tradition for my girlfriend and I," says Cathy Chappell of Barrington. "It's comfortable and elegant. Not snooty or stuffy. You are waited on with style, but you don't have to dress to the nines to go there. The tea is very authentic. There's harp music and a big poof of flowers in the center of the room. Over the years I've learned you occasionally have to pamper yourself. That's why I have The Drake."



Best Toy Store: VILLAGE TOY SHOP

807 ELM ST., WINNETKA, 847/446-7990

The Village Toy Shop has been in business for more than 50 years, making it a Winnetka institution. Now it's getting a dose of new energy thanks to its new owner, 33-year-old Elizabeth Berwanger. But she shouldn't have a problem taking over: the store's owner until this year was her mother, Patricia. And some of the sales staff (the people Elizabeth and Patricia refer to as "our ladies") have been working at the shop for 30 years. What keeps people coming back is the personal touch.

Moms and dads often call the store with a last-minute crisis: they're on their way to a birthday party for one of their children's friends, and have no idea what present to buy. The staff makes suggestions over the phone, then has the gift wrapped and ready by the time the panicked parent arrives.