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JAMES BEARD FOUNDATION NAMES 2011 AMERICA'S CLASSICS AWARD HONOREES

*Five America's Classics Restaurants To Be Honored at the Annual
James Beard Foundation Awards on Monday, May 9, 2011 in New York City*

New York, NY (March 10, 2011) – Today, the James Beard Foundation announced the five honorees for the 2011 James Beard Foundation Awards America's Classics category, presented by The Coca-Cola Company. The America's Classics award is given to restaurants with timeless appeal, beloved for quality food that reflects the character of their community. This year's five America's Classics honorees will be celebrated at the annual James Beard Foundation Awards, the nation's most prestigious recognition program honoring professionals in the food and beverage industries, in an awards ceremony taking place on Monday, May 9, 2011 at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall in New York City.

"The America's Classics category is very special to us," says Susan Ungaro, President of the James Beard Foundation. "They represent, in the best possible way, America's great melting pot. These special dining establishments bring their communities together around the table, something James Beard would have loved."

The 2011 James Beard Foundation Awards America's Classics award honorees are:

Chef Vola's (111 South Albion Place, Atlantic City, NJ, 609-345-2022 – Owners: Louise Esposito, Michael Esposito, Michael Esposito Jr., Louis Esposito)

Some believe that Chef Vola's, operating in the basement of a former boarding house since 1921, is hard to get into, that you need to know someone, that Louise Esposito, the woman who answers the once-unlisted telephone number, screens applicants for a table.

Urban legend. Fact is, all are welcome. Once here, you're family. A single serving of the peerless veal chop, done parm-style, feeds, maybe, six. The red gravy is revered, as is the veal swathed in Prosciutto. Ditto the cannellini-green bean salad crowned by cubes of provolone and salami. Frank Sinatra once said he wanted to be buried with one of Chef Vola's banana cream pies.

In 1982, the Esposito family bought the restaurant from the Vola clan. Today, Louise, along with her husband Michael, and sons Michael, Jr. and Louis, work the kitchen and the dining room, an always-humming space in which a Naples-born grandma would feel at home.

Customers make pilgrimages to eat at Chef Vola's. They come for the people. They come for the food, for dishes that serve as standard-bearers of an Italian-American culinary tradition that may be more loved in the heart of the Mid-Atlantic than anywhere else.

-- Andy Clurfeld (*Asbury Park Press*)

Watts Tea Shop (761 N. Jefferson Street, Milwaukee, WI, 414-290-5700, President and CEO: Sam Watts)

George Watts & Son is a fifth-generation downtown Milwaukee business that celebrated its 140th anniversary in 2010. The store's first floor is devoted to an astounding inventory of china, glassware, flatware, linens and tchotchkes. Most of the building's second floor is home to its well-mannered restaurant, Watts Tea Shop.

The restaurant's roots date back to the mid-1920s, when then-owner Howard Watts built a beautiful new building to house his family business. His great-grandson, 31-year-old Sam Watts, is now the store's president. The tea shop became a beloved destination among generations of Milwaukee devotees and it remains a quiet mainstay of the downtown lunch scene.

Many of the dishes follow recipes that have been used since the 1930s, including the soft whole-wheat bread, the English muffins, and the olive-nut and chicken salad finger sandwiches. The star of the show, legacy recipe-wise, is Sunshine Cake, a spectacular three-layer lemon chiffon extravagance that's filled with lemon curd, slathered in a thick seven-minute icing, and garnished with an edible flower.

"These kinds of retail-restaurant operations are often a break-even proposition at best," Watts said recently. "But the tea shop has been our saving grace during this economic downturn. We not might have been able to weathered the storm were it not for the 100 or so people coming into our store every day to have lunch. It has been our godsend."

-- Rick Nelson (*Star Tribune*)

Le Veau d'Or (129 East 60th Street, New York, NY, 212-838-8133, Owner: Robert Trébbox)

The diminutive French bistro Le Veau d'Or in Midtown is a time capsule. There's the classic French fare, straight out of Escoffier; the formal but clubby décor, all beveled glass and polished mahogany; and the amiable owner, Monsieur Trébbox, who chats up the regulars, pours drinks behind the bar, and ferries dishes from the kitchen.

Le Veau d'Or (The Golden Calf) opened in 1937; Trébbox—who is now in his 80s and runs the restaurant with his daughter, Cathy—bought it in 1985, after a career working in many of the neighborhood's now bygone French restaurants.

In its heyday, Le Veau d'Or was a celebrity haunt. Grace Kelly met Oleg Cassini there, and food critic Craig Claiborne called it the one restaurant he couldn't live without. Although Trébbox's clientele has changed over the years, the food is as traditional and delicious as ever.

The affordable table d'hôte menu, which includes an appetizer, entrée, and dessert, offers such classics as coq au vin, cassoulet, boeuf à la bourguignonne, and céleri rémoulade. On any day of the week, you can get an excellent trout meunière and a steller terrine du chef. All that said, this isn't the kind of place where the chef takes center stage. If anyone's a star here, it's Trébbox.

-- James Oseland (*Saveur*)

Noriega Restaurant and Hotel (525 Sumner St., Bakersfield, CA, 661-322-8419, Owner: Linda Elizalde McCoy and Rochelle Ladd)

The Noriega Restaurant and Hotel has been the hub of Kern County Basque culture since Faustino Noriega opened its doors in 1893. In 1931 the Elizalde family took over, and has run the restaurant ever since. Originally founded as a home away from home for shepherds, today the institution showcases the Basque culture of California's San Joaquin Valley.

Located in a warehouse district just east of downtown, the Noriega has a façade that could be mistaken for a neighborhood bar. A jai-alai court (a form of Basque handball) is built into the structure. Parties are individually called into the dining room, where they take their places at long tables covered in checkered oilcloth.

The dinner that ensues is always multi-coursed and abundant, but it is a generosity marked by great care. The tongue is pickled in-house and thin-sliced. The roast leg of lamb, served on Fridays, is herb-flecked and tender. Big wedges of creamy blue cheese close the meal.

With very fair pricing (children are only charged a dollar per year up to age 12) a meal at the Noriega is accessible to all. What you get is a dinner that is invariably marked by the simmered note of home cooking, a glimpse into a community that has played an important role in this agricultural region for over a century, and a sense, through seasoning and ingredients, of how a people adapted to a new culture while being true to its own.

-- Patric Kuh (*Los Angeles Magazine*)

Crook's Corner (610 West Franklin Street, Chapel Hill, NC, 919-929-7643, Owner: Gene Hamer)

Hubcaps decorate the flanks of the corner building on the fringe of this college town. A pink fiberglass pig stands atop the roof. The dining room does double duty as an art gallery. From the bar, you may order a cracker plate, piled with house-made pimento cheese, and a block of cream cheese smeared with pepper jelly.

Since 1982, when restaurateur Gene Hamer and chef Bill Neal opened the doors, Crook's Corner has carried the torch of regional foodways, employing and inspiring a generation of young culinary talent— including two James Beard Award-winning chefs.

Bill Neal was one of the first American chefs to explore the cultural import of the regional food he worked to revive. He brought academic rigor and provincial pride to the professional restaurant kitchens of the region.

Since Neal's untimely death in 1991, Gene Hamer has served as the restaurant's steward, while Bill Smith has overseen the kitchen, cooking iconic Crook's dishes like shrimp and grits, hoppin' John, jalapeno hushpuppies, and persimmon pudding. In more recent years, Smith has added his own flourishes, including house-corned ham and honeysuckle sorbet.
- Christiane Lauterbach (*Atlanta Magazine*)

"We are honored to be a sponsor of this year's James Beard Foundation Awards, and in particular, of a category that resonates with Coca-Cola's own place on the American cultural landscape," says Dana Barba, VP, Region Commercialization of Coca-Cola Refreshments, sponsor of this year's America's Classics award. "The James Beard Foundation Awards recognize the best of the best in food, restaurants and chefs and our association brings the equity of great brands together."

To qualify for the America's Classics award, establishments must have been in existence at least 10 years and they must be locally owned. The honorees are selected each year by the James Beard Foundation's Restaurant Committee, which is composed of 17 people throughout the country, many of whom are notable food critics and culinary writers. The Foundation also holds a public call for entries (via a website hosted by StarChefs.com), allowing the public the opportunity to offer suggestions for which restaurants they think should win.

On **Monday, March 21, 2011**, the James Beard Foundation will announce the final nominees for all award categories during a press conference at the Oregon Culinary Institute in Portland, OR, followed by an invitation-only seated luncheon. The nominations will also be announced live via the James Beard Foundation's Twitter page at <http://twitter.com/beardfoundation>. On **Friday, May 6, 2011**, the annual **James Beard Foundation Book, Broadcast & Journalism Awards Dinner**, an exclusive event honoring the nation's top cookbook authors, culinary broadcast producers and hosts, and food journalists, will take place at Espace in New York City. The evening will be hosted by **Ted Allen** and **Gail Simmons**. On **Monday, May 9, 2011**, **Tom Colicchio**, **Ming Tsai** and **Traci Des Jardins** will host the **James Beard Foundation Awards Ceremony and Gala Reception** at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall in New York City. During the event, which is open to the public, awards for the Restaurant and Chef, Restaurant Design and Graphics categories will be handed out, along with special achievement awards including Humanitarian of the Year, Lifetime Achievement, Who's Who and the five America's Classics award honorees. During the Gala Reception immediately following, top culinary talents from across the country will be serving dishes that reflect the nation's diverse and multi-cultural influences in a nod to this year's awards theme, "The Ultimate Melting Pot."

Established in 1990, the James Beard Foundation Awards recognize culinary professionals for excellence and achievement in their fields and continue to emphasize the Foundation's mission: to celebrate, preserve, and nurture America's culinary heritage and diversity. The annual James Beard Foundation Awards honor the best and the brightest talents in the food and beverage industries, celebrating outstanding achievement in each of the following categories: Restaurant and Chef, Restaurant Design and Graphics, Books, Broadcast, and Journalism, as well as several special achievement awards. Each category has an individual Awards Committee made up of industry professionals who volunteer their time to oversee the policies, procedures, and selection of judges for their respective Awards program. All award winners receive a certificate and a bronze medallion engraved with the James Beard Foundation Awards insignia. There are no cash prizes.

The 2011 James Beard Foundation Awards are presented with support by the following partners: In Association Sponsor: All-Clad Metalcrafters; Premier Sponsors: Green & Black's® Organic Chocolate, Lenox Tableware and Gifts, Mercedes-Benz; Supporting Sponsors: The Coca-Cola Company, Delta Air Lines, Lavazza, Southern Wine & Spirits of New York, Stella Artois; Gala Reception Sponsors: Acqua Panna® Natural Spring Water, Certified Angus Beef® Brand, Ecolab, Pernod Ricard USA, Rums of Puerto Rico, S.Pellegrino® Sparkling Natural Mineral Water; and with additional support from Chefwear and St. Giles Hotel.

About the James Beard Foundation

Founded in 1986, the James Beard Foundation is dedicated to celebrating, preserving, and nurturing America's culinary heritage and diversity in order to elevate the appreciation of our culinary excellence. A cookbook author and teacher with an encyclopedic knowledge about food, James Beard, who died in 1985, was a champion of American cuisine. He helped educate and mentor generations of professional chefs and food enthusiasts. Today, the Beard Foundation continues in the same spirit by administering a number of diverse programs that include educational initiatives, food industry awards, scholarships to culinary schools, and publications, and by maintaining the historic James Beard House in New York City's Greenwich Village as a "performance space" for visiting chefs. For more information, please visit www.jamesbeard.org. Find insights on food at the James Beard Foundation's blog [Delights & Prejudices](#). Join the James Beard Foundation on [Facebook](#). Follow the James Beard Foundation on [Twitter](#).

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