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**THE JAMES BEARD FOUNDATION® ANNOUNCES THE 2024  
RESTAURANT AND CHEF AMERICA'S CLASSICS AWARD WINNERS**

**NEW YORK (February 28, 2024)** – The James Beard Foundation® announces today the six recipients of its 2024 America's Classics Award, presented by HEINZ. A Restaurant and Chef Awards category, the America's Classics Award is given to locally owned restaurants that serve quality food, have timeless appeal, and reflect the character of their communities.

This year's winners join the ranks of over one hundred restaurants across the country that have received the award since the category was introduced in 1998. They will be celebrated at the James Beard Restaurant and Chef Awards ceremony on Monday, June 10, at the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

"On behalf of the James Beard Foundation, I extend heartfelt congratulations to this year's America's Classics winners—national treasures of timeless appeal that reflect the richness and diversity of our country's food culture," said **Clare Reichenbach, CEO of the James Beard Foundation**. "As cornerstones of our communities, we are honored to recognize your long dedication and contribution to our industry. Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition."

The James Beard Awards, among the nation's most prestigious culinary honors, recognize exceptional talent in the culinary and food media industries, as well as a demonstrated commitment to racial and gender equity, community, sustainability, and a culture where all can thrive. The James Beard Restaurant and Chef Awards celebrate excellence across all types of dining experiences, from fine dining to casual gems in our communities, while supporting and encouraging a more sustainable industry.

"The America's Classics Award showcases the beloved independent restaurants that have been integral to American food culture across cities big and small," said **Restaurant and Chef Awards Subcommittee Co-Chairs Lauren Saria and Allecia Vermillion**. "It is an honor to recognize this year's winners that emulate the spirit of their communities, while also setting a commendable standard for our entire industry."

"Today we extend our congratulations to the 2024 America's Classics winners, as well as express our gratitude to our Restaurant and Chef Subcommittee members for their role in recognizing and uplifting the cherished dining establishments that make up this year's winners," said **Dawn Padmore, Vice President of Awards**.

**The 2024 James Beard Award America's Classics winners are:**

## **America's Classics: California**

### **Mandalay**

**San Francisco, CA**

**Current Owner: Kevin Chen**

San Francisco is one of the greatest Burmese restaurant cities in America, but of them all, Mandalay might be the best of the bunch. Open since 1984, this unfussy restaurant near the city's Richmond District was not the first Burmese restaurant to open in San Francisco but is the oldest still in operation today. Current owner Kevin Chen tells the *New York Times* that his family members who started the restaurant wanted to introduce the American dining public to Burmese food, which was at that time, all but impossible to find. The country's cuisine pulls influences from India, China, and Thailand, all of which border Myanmar. Today most diners at Mandalay order the famous tea leaf salad, which leans more traditional than versions offered at other local Burmese spots. Here, it's a bevy of crunchy sesame and lentil seeds, ground shrimp, fried garlic, and peanuts with fermented imported tea leaves all tossed tableside with a squeeze of lemon and peppers. Other standout dishes include the slightly sour samusa soup made filled with falafel, samusa, potatoes, lentils, shredded cabbage, and mint leaf, as well as the Mandalay special noodle. A platter of wide noodles swim in a fragrant coconut broth with chicken, onion, and fried thin noodles scattered on top.

## **America's Classics: Mid-Atlantic**

### **Vietnam Restaurant**

**Philadelphia, PA**

**Current Owner: Benny Lai**

The Lai family was among the first wave of Vietnamese refugees who came to Philadelphia to build a life on hard work and entrepreneurship fueled by lemongrass-scented feasts. The founding couple, Nhu Lai and Thuyen Luu, fled Vietnam by boat with their eight children after being stripped of their sandal factory in 1978. After nearly a year in a Malaysian refugee camp, they arrived in Philadelphia in 1979, began with a grocery, then quickly transitioned to a modest restaurant space in Chinatown in 1984. By 2000, after handing the business over to their son, Benny, moving to a larger multi-floor space next door, and undergoing a decor makeover evoking French colonial accents, the family secured Vietnam's place as one of Philly's favorite date-night destinations for classic Vietnamese cuisine. From barbecue platters laden with grilled meats, stuffed grape leaves, and Philly's crispiest spring rolls, to nước chấm—splashed vermicelli bowls, fragrant noodle soups, lemongrass stir-fries, and clay pots sizzling with caramelized pork, Vietnam's kitchen has remained a model of consistency for decades. A second branch in West Philadelphia, Vietnam Café, has become a neighborhood favorite there, too, while the family's neighboring market, Fu Wah, has become a standard-bearer for its bánh mì.

## **America's Classics: Midwest**

### **Pheasant Restaurant and Lounge**

**Brookings, SD**

**Current Owner: Georgiana Olson and Michael Johnson**

A colorful eight-foot bird sculpture welcomes diners to the Pheasant Restaurant and Lounge, the oldest full-service restaurant in Brookings, South Dakota. Family-run for three generations, the Pheasant was born in 1949 as a gas station café. Current chef and manager Michael Johnson's grandparents, Georgiana and Ronald Olson, purchased the Pheasant in 1966 and ran it concurrently with a pizzeria in Madison, South Dakota, before moving to Brookings, a college town north of Sioux Falls in eastern South

Dakota. The menu is full of iconic mid-century dishes of the upper Midwest, like hot roast beef on homemade white bread with mashed potatoes and gravy; Nordic waffles (vafler) made with cardamom and folded around smoked salmon or gjetost; classics, like chef salad, spätzle, and liver and onions; and riffs on comfort food like duck wings, bison steak au poivre, and a lamb burger with local jalapeño jelly and peanut butter. The Pheasant sources from local farmers, serving South Dakota's state "nosh" chislic (cubed, deep-fried sheep meat)—made with lamb from Sturdy Post Ranch in rural Ward, South Dakota. Johnson introduced pheasant salad to the menu in homage to the restaurant's name and South Dakota history – WWII troops traveling through the state were treated to pheasant salad sandwiches en route to deployment. Paula Olson-Meyer and Karen Olson-Hernandez, the Olsons' daughters, each ran the restaurant before passing the torch to Meyer's son, Michael Johnson and partner Trevor Clements. Under Johnson's leadership, the Pheasant remains a community anchor while being open to change. As it updates accessibility for patrons and staff with disabilities, supports local musicians, and serves \$9 "early bird" dinners, Pheasant Restaurant and Lounge embodies the good, simple food and hospitality of South Dakota.

### **America's Classics: New York State**

#### **Sylvia's Restaurant**

**New York, NY**

**Current Owners: The Woods Family**

Sylvia's Restaurant is a Harlem, New York City institution. The late owner, Sylvia Woods, dubbed "The Queen of Soul Food," founded the now-iconic restaurant in 1962 after buying the luncheonette where she worked as a cook and waitress for 16 years. For over 62 years Sylvia's has been serving her traditional South Carolina soul food—like the world-famous barbecue ribs, fried chicken, and smothered pork chops—to Presidents, governors, mayors, heads of state, dignitaries, and her beloved Harlem community. Sylvia's continues to be a family legacy, helmed today by her son, Kenneth Woods. Together the family has built the brand to include a nationwide line of food products, catering and special events divisions, cookbooks, a real estate holding company, and community service through scholarships and myriad philanthropic endeavors. Sylvia's Restaurant is the embodiment of American entrepreneurial self-determination and will remain one of America's Classics for decades to come.

### **America's Classics: Southeast**

#### **Wade's Restaurant**

**Spartanburg, SC**

**Current Owners: Hamp Lindsey, Wade Lindsey III, and Anna Lindsey Liles**

For 77 years, Wade's Restaurant has called Spartanburg, South Carolina home. The family-run restaurant considers its 130+ employees the heart of its operation. Founded in 1947 by Wade and Betty Lindsey, Wade's follows family recipes for its Southern meat-and-three menu, though possibly in larger quantities than Betty could have ever imagined. Today, 2,500 guests visit Wade's daily; 3,500 made-from-scratch yeast rolls are served; along with 750 turkey plates and more than 1,500 orders of mac and cheese. Everything is made fresh from whole foods and served at a fair price. It's a place where tea is steeped the old-fashioned way, and chicken is breaded by hand. The Lindsey children, Hamp and Carole, took the helm in 1977 and now grandkids Wade and Anna have joined the team and lead operations alongside Joey Basso. Sonya Hunter and Ray Pearson lead the charge in the kitchen and have been part of the Wade's Restaurant family for more than two decades. But every team member is made to feel valued, and it shows up as part of the warm, yet efficient, hospitality. "We want our employees to be proud to wear the Wade's logo," says Hamp. "Come taste our Southern hospitality."

### **America's Classics: Southwest**

#### **Peppermill Restaurant and Fireside Lounge**

**Las Vegas, NV**

## **Current Owners: Nat Carasali and Bill Paganetti (†)**

Opened in 1972 by Nat Carasali and Bill Paganetti, the Peppermill Restaurant and Fireside Lounge has been a Las Vegas icon for over 51 years. It's appeared in movies like *Casino* and *Show Girls*, has been frequented by mobsters and celebrities, and it's best known for its over-the-top pink and purple neon nights, fire pits, faux botanicals, oversized drinks in the cocktail lounge, and massive platters of diner classics in the family-friendly restaurant. What really makes it special is the welcoming atmosphere. It's a place where pit bosses, dancers, bartenders and other Vegas industry folk can come after a late shift. It's a haven, a safe place, described as somewhere no one gets bothered and where longtime waitresses will remember your name. It's also a place where people want to work and want to stay. Peggy Orth began waitressing at the Peppermill when she was 17, about a year and a half after the restaurant first opened. Decades later, she's now general manager and her son Nicholas is the executive chef. Not much has changed in the last five decades, and that's just how everyone likes it.

Each year, the Restaurant and Chef Awards Subcommittee recommends, discusses, and selects the America's Classics winners. Six of the twelve Restaurant and Chef regions are included within each Awards cycle, and rotated the following cycle, so that each region is represented every other year. The public may submit recommendations for this category for consideration by subcommittee members. To be eligible for this award, establishments must have been in existence for at least ten years.

The James Beard Awards policies and procedures can be viewed at [jamesbeard.org/awards/policies](https://jamesbeard.org/awards/policies).

## **Upcoming Awards Announcements (dates may be subject to change):**

- **Wednesday, April 3, 2024:** Restaurant and Chef Awards Nominees and Achievement Awards Honorees (Lifetime Achievement, Humanitarian of the Year, and Leadership Awards) announced live at Waldorf Astoria Washington DC
- **Tuesday, April 30, 2024:** Nominees for the James Beard Media Awards

## **The 2024 Awards ceremonies will be held in our proud host city of Chicago on the following dates:**

- **Saturday, June 8, 2024:** Media Awards at Columbia College Chicago Student Center
- **Sunday, June 9, 2024:** Leadership Awards at The Dalcy
- **Monday, June 10, 2024:** Restaurant and Chef Awards at The Lyric Opera

## **PRESS ASSETS**

- Image selects (please credit appropriate restaurant listed in file details): [available here](#).
- Press credentials: If interested in attending and covering the 2024 James Beard Awards, please apply via [this form](#).
- Awards press kit: available [at this link](#).
- Awards videos: visit our [YouTube page](#) to watch Awards explainer videos, as well as past videos from the James Beard Awards.

The 2024 James Beard Awards are presented by Capital One, the official credit card and banking partner of the James Beard Foundation. The James Beard Awards are proudly hosted by Choose Chicago and the Illinois Restaurant Association, and presented in association with Hilton, as well as with the following partners: Premier Sponsors: Acqua Panna® Natural Spring Water, American Airlines, the official airline of the James Beard Foundation, HEINZ, HMSHost, S.Pellegrino® Sparkling Mineral Water, Stella Artois; Supporting Sponsors: HexClad Cookware, Skuna Bay Salmon; Reception Sponsors: Ecolab, Kendall College at National Louis University, Windstar Cruises, the official cruise line of the James Beard

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For more information about the James Beard Awards, visit [jamesbeard.org/awards](https://jamesbeard.org/awards). For up-to-the-minute news about the Awards, follow [@beardfoundation](https://twitter.com/beardfoundation) on X (Twitter) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/beardfoundation) and keep an eye out for posts using #jbfa.

## **ABOUT THE JAMES BEARD AWARDS**

The James Beard Awards recognizes exceptional talent and achievement in the culinary arts, hospitality, media, and broader food system, as well as a demonstrated commitment to racial and gender equity, community, sustainability, and a culture where all can thrive. Established in 1990, the James Beard Awards are among the nation's most prestigious honors recognizing leaders in the culinary and food media industries and those in the broader food systems. The Awards are overseen by the Awards Committee. Each Awards program (Book, Broadcast Media, Journalism, Leadership, and Restaurant and Chef) has its own subcommittee members who volunteer their time to oversee the policies, procedures, and selection of judges for their respective program. All James Beard Award winners receive a certificate and a medallion engraved with the James Beard Foundation Awards insignia. For more information, visit our [website](https://jamesbeard.org) and subscribe to the Awards digital newsletter.

## **ABOUT THE JAMES BEARD FOUNDATION**

The James Beard Foundation (JBF) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that celebrates and supports the people behind America's food culture, while pushing for new standards in the restaurant industry to create a future where all have the opportunity to thrive. Established over 30 years ago, the Foundation has highlighted the centrality of food culture in our daily lives and is committed to supporting a resilient and flourishing industry that honors its diverse communities. By amplifying new voices, celebrating those leading the way, and supporting those on the path to do so, the Foundation is working to create a more equitable and sustainable future—what we call Good Food for Good®. JBF brings its mission to life through the annual Awards, industry and community-focused programs, advocacy, partnerships, and events across the country. For the first time in the Foundation's history, exceptional culinary talent, industry leaders, and visitors from NYC and beyond can experience unforgettable dining and educational programming at [Platform by the James Beard Foundation](https://platform.jamesbeardfoundation.org)—and be the first to try new food concepts at the Good To Go by JBF kiosk—inspiring food and beverage devotees for decades to come. Learn more at [jamesbeard.org](https://jamesbeard.org), sign up for our newsletter, and follow [@beardfoundation](https://twitter.com/beardfoundation) on social media.

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