Bennu's Philip (l) and Knucks

DEVAKI KNOWLES

Best Caffeinated Cut-Ups
BENNU'S KNUCKS, AMIE, AND PHILIP

Here are four very good reasons to get your coffee from Bennu in the morning:

1) Amie Moffett
2) Knuckles
3) Philip Reeder
4) You can actually find a seat.

We can't guarantee No. 4, but we endorse wholeheartedly the morning bliss of simply being in the presence of No.s 1-3. The morning crew at Bennu are by turns tender and tough, matching the energy you bring to the counter. If you're a regular (and we are) they may dedicate a song to you, encourage you to try a new concoction, and ask about how that novel/script/dissertation is going. In short, they know what it is you need: coffee. But, really, you need more than coffee. And they know that, too.
2001 E. MLK, 512/478-4700, www.bennucoffee.com

Best Pollo Asado EL POLLO RICO

TODD V. WOLFSON

That smoky smell wafting down South First Street leads to a swift *pollo asado* drive-up. In mere minutes, a bag of the grilled, hot, steaming goodness passes through the window, complete with all the fixins: rice, beans, tortillas, salsa y limón. Three locations churn out authentic Monterrey cuisine, presenting their specialty: the whole or half *pollo asado*, and a slew of other goodies for a reasonable price. But only South First has the drive-through.
Various locations, www.pollosricos.com

Best Way to Take Back the Tea Party
ZHI TEA

Remember when the words "tea party" conjured something pleasant – or at least less terrifying than a bunch of Rand-os with open carry permits? Homegrown Zhi Tea is here to steer us back to civility. Its (organic, Fair Trade) teas are made in Austin, and the sophisticated blends are sold and served all over town, from Wheatsville to the W; they also do a brisk online business. Best of all is Zhi Tea Gallery, its peaceful cafe and outdoor space for working, hanging out, replenishing your soul – and perhaps having a tea party you can believe in.
4607 Bolm, 888/944-4832, www.zhitea.com

JOHN ANDERSON

1 Best Pancakes on the Move
THE OMELETTRY

Since Kenny Carpenter found the spot for his breakfast joint and opened in 1978, he's been slinging the best fresh food around. Before farm-to-table became the rage, the Omelettry always offered fresh fruit and vegetables alongside their famous breakfast fare. Gingerbread pancakes bigger than a dinner plate, thick and gloppy queso, crispy bacon, and bottomless coffee cups are just a few of our memories. Trusty legend has it that Doug Sahm feigned annoyance every morning when he arrived to find his oatmeal not hot and ready. The move from the homey spot we've come to love to a newer, larger location on Airport Boulevard may take some getting used to, but home is where the heart is. And with more space – and shorter waits on weekends – we think this is a moveable feast.
4811 Burnet Rd., 512/453-5062, www.theomelettry.com

CRITICS PICKS
25 YEARS BEST OF AUSTIN 25 YEARS
FOOD

Best Yogurt Magicians
WHITE MOUNTAIN FOODS

For over three decades, these mountaineers have served as Austin's own yogis of yogurt. A second-generation family business, White Mountain Foods provides astonishingly pure and well-crafted local yogurt, tofu, seitan, and tamales. Before the Eastside got hip, this visionary biz redeveloped an abandoned meat packing plant on East Fifth into a haven for vegetarian food production. The rest is delicious history.
3301 E. Fifth, 512/385-4711, www.whitemountainfoods.com

Best Chop CITYWIDE 86'D

A live competition – much like that foodie reality show *Chopped* – that features Austin chefs battling mano-a-spatula for supremacy in a contest judged by their most talented peers? What's not to love, especially when the audience is treated to a relentless array of wine and beer and samples from the menus of the finest restaurants in town, while the culinary gladiators slice and dice and grill and bake their way to the sort of victory claimed, this year, by Uchiko's Ben Schwartz.
www.citywide86d.com

Best Heed This Call
SHERLON JACKSON (AKA "THE PIZZA LADY") AT SAN MARCOS H-E-B

PIIIIIIIIZZZZZZZZZZZAAAAAAAAAAAA! Thus goes the siren call of Sherlon Jackson, known simply and sweetly to San Marcos H-E-B shoppers as "The Pizza Lady." Most sample queens demurely wait for snackers to tentatively reach for little cups of sloppy joe (*ew?*) or a small wheat thin to be dipped in the latest, unfortunately named jalapeño jam. But Ms. Jackson (she is *for reaaaal*) is not most sample queens. Initially hired to demo pizza part-time, her, ah, boisterous battle cry ensures everyone in the dang store knows there's pizza samples to be had. And that's sans amplification, translating to more pizzas sold (since 2009, the store holds the H-E-B record for pizza sales), and a full-time gig for Jackson.
641 E. Hopkins, San Marcos, 512/396-8880, www.heb.com

COURTESY OF SAMANTHA ARMBRUSTER

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