



## Better than really good

We give them brownie points for modesty. Lisa and Eddie King and their staff in Columbus, Ohio, claim they make “really good brownies.”

However, we disagree. The gooey, chewy, completely decadent squares they dubbed Brownie Points rank in the “stupendous” category.

You can make up a box with your favorites (*The Sampler*, \$25.95 for 12, left) or sign up for a six- or 12-month supply. Choose from 13 flavors, including Original Kitchen Sink (butterscotch; peanut butter; dark, milk and white chocolate beneath a layer of crushed toffee and topped with a drizzle of caramel). One of our top picks: Raspberry Caramel Fudge (tastes just like it sounds).

If your snacking urge runs deeper, munch on seven flavors of Darn Good Popcorn (their description). Or try chocolate candies such as Buckeye Bark. The salty pretzels and vanilla butternut popcorn are topped with chocolate and peanut butter.

To visit (tours available) or to order: Brownie Points, 47 East Johnstown Road (800/427-9643; [www.browniepointsinc.com](http://www.browniepointsinc.com)).

PHOTOGRAPHS: (FROM TOP) PETE KRUMHARDT; JASON WILDE

A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE MIDWEST FINDS

# discoveries

## A cherry of a basket

Samuel Patterson would, no doubt, be proud.

His great-great-great-grandson, Matt Adelman, heads the Berlin Fruit Box Company Samuel founded in Berlin Heights, Ohio, in 1858. During the fall, the company added American black cherry baskets to its line of hardwood maple goods. Handmade cherry baskets come in a variety of styles, including a small picnic basket (\$58; *cherry lid*, \$41) and a glass-lined vase basket (\$54, *flowers not included*).

Hour-long workshop tours are available 9 a.m.–3 p.m. Monday through Friday by appointment. For information or to order: Berlin Fruit Box Company, 51 Mechanic Street (888/905-1858; [www.samuelpattersonbaskets.com](http://www.samuelpattersonbaskets.com)).



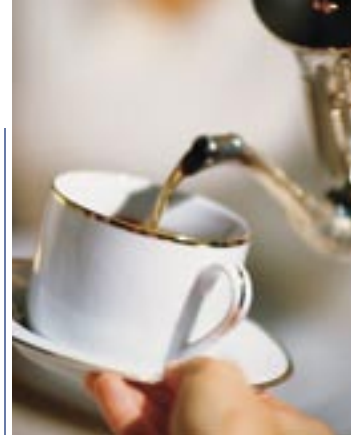


## Divine fine dining

Delightful risotto, tender beef and seasoned seafood arrive at diners' tables inside an 1851 Gothic Revival church in St. Charles, Illinois (45 miles northwest of Chicago).

At 18 Esperienza (the name comes from part of the address; it also is the Italian word for "experience"), patrons walk into an elegant atmosphere with refinished oak floors and cushy leather chairs. (From left) Ray Whitson (co-owner with Julia Hoffman) and Chef Grant Werner present a menu of fish, beef, chicken and pork, plus a signature risotto of the day. The filet mignon arrives enveloped in a garlic-butter sauce with a tinge of fire. For a dramatic presentation, the halibut-and-polenta tower is a must. Indulgence comes in the form of hazelnut-chocolate cake: an airy confection topped with hazelnuts, vanilla gelato and cocoa.

Open 5–9 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays and 5–10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. 18 Esperienza, 18 N. 4th Street (630/443-8400; [www.18esperienza.com](http://www.18esperienza.com)).



## COME FOR TEA AND TRADITION

Some traditions are just too good to let go. After the tearoom at the former L.S. Ayres department store in Indianapolis closed in 1990, regulars thought the special lunches and the store's seasonal decorations, events and atmosphere were gone forever.

Luckily, the Indiana State Museum stepped in to re-create a replica of the 1905 tearoom. Food favorites such as Chicken Velvet Soup are on the menu, and new generations soak up the Christmas festivities.

At the museum, Santa arrives by helicopter (at noon on November 19) just as he did in the department store's heyday. Celebration Crossing (the holiday exhibit) features store window miniatures from L.S. Ayres.

Tearoom dining is available by reservation only. Open daily 11 a.m.–2:30 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Easter. Indiana State Museum, 202 N. Alabama Street, Indianapolis (317/232-1637; [www.in.gov/ism](http://www.in.gov/ism)).

# discoveries etc.

## Indulge yourself with Yuletide Cheer

Just in time for your holiday gift-giving, consider natural body-care soaps such as Yuletide Cheer, Celtic Christmas, Santa's Pipe, Jack Frost, and others made by Patti Ehaney of Appleton, Wisconsin. Her company, Soap Dance, also makes such as lotions, creams, botanical mists, shower mousse and lip butters, plus more than 40 beautifully labeled bar soaps.

For the beer-lover on your list, consider the Wisconsin Lager soap, made with Leinenkugel's Honey Weiss beer (also brewed in Wisconsin). Yuletide Cheer contains a whiff of northwoods evergreen while Celtic Christmas issues a cinnamon-nutmeg scent. Patty calls Frankincense & Myrrh, a "smoky scent with hints of vanilla and amber." All contain blends of oils and butters.

Five- to six-ounce bars cost \$4.95, plus shipping. For information or to order: Soap Dance (920/733-0606; [www.soapdance.com](http://www.soapdance.com)).



PHOTOGRAPHS: (TOP TO BOTTOM) PHOTODISC COLLECTION/GETTY; BOB STEFKO; JASON WILDE