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WINNERS & FINALISTS

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When we chose the stories for this edition, all the events and dates were accurate. As always, find the most-up-to-date information on the event activity website, Facebook page or other direct information source.



LOOK INSIDE

You voted! Here are your Readers Choice Winners & Finalists



READER'S CHOICE WINNERS



READER'S CHOICE AWARDS: BEST RETAIL SHOP WINNERS FOR 2022

BY MLIVE STAFF | mlive.com

he votes are in and the Reader's Choice Awards winners and finalists are stacking up across the state. Earlier this year, we asked our readers to nominate their favorite shops and stores across nine retail categories in a contest sponsored by MLive Media Group and Michigan's Best. Then we asked people to vote for their favorite nominees. Now that the votes have been tallied, we have a mix of winners stretching from Farmington Hills to Muskegon.

Some are big-name retail spots. Others are hometown favorites that are sure to get a big boost from their Reader's Choice win.

"Reader's Choice has been a great way to lift up the local businesses in Michigan that mean so much to our communities," said Jamie Dionne, vice president of sales for MLive Media Group. "It's fun to see our readers champion their favorite spots and push for their favorites to win. The

best part is giving these businesses a spotlight to shine that can help them grow."

Reader's Choice contests began in 2021 as the next step after a decade of fan-favorite food and beverage searches under the Michigan's Best banner. The program expanded as an opportunity to highlight even more - and different kinds of - businesses across the state.

This year's Reader's Choice retail focus celebrates places big and small. Whether it's our favorite wine store, our go-to spot for new sports gear, or our neighborhood cannabis shop, the votes were cast for places our readers love to visit.

"As part of the promotion of this program, all nominees have access to a free media kit filled with social media cards, logos, and more that they can

use to encourage their audiences to vote. And it's very clear they do!," said Anne Drummond, director of creative advertising sales for MLive Media Group.

"New this year is exclusive access to a website where our winners and finalists can secure banners, T-shirts and other merchandise for their businesses. Those that finished last year in the top positions worked with us to develop these items after their win, and it was clear this was a natural, next step. I hope our audiences will learn of their win through these materials and join us in congratulating them on being a destination retailer for Michigan residents."

What follows are the Reader's Choice winners and finalists. There may be more than one winner per category if votes were tied. The finalists are listed in no particular order.

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2022

Reader's Choice Awards

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WINNERS & FINALISTS

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APPAREL & ACCESSORIES

BEST ATHLETIC GEAR PROVIDER

★ **WINNER**
STYLED BY BLAKE, LLC
Oscoda, MI
989-323-7514
styledbyblake.com

FINALISTS (in no particular order)
• **Taj Cottage**
38429 Grand River Ave
Farmington Hills, MI 48335
tajcottage.com
• **Audrey Lane Boutique & Consignment**
4496 Plainfield Ave NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525

ATHLETIC & OUTDOOR

★ **WINNER**
NORTHWOODS WHOLESALE OUTLET INC.
229 W 5th St
Pinconning, MI 48650
989-879-1110
northwoodsoutlet.com

FINALISTS (in no particular order)
• **Gazelle Sports** Grand Rapids
3930 28th St SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49512
gazelle.com
• **Arlen Schut Greenhouse**
2431 Van Buren St
Hudsonville, MI 49426
616-669-5588
arlenschutgreenhouse.com

BOOKS, MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT

★ **WINNER**
SCHULER BOOKS
2660 28th St SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49512
616-942-2561
schulerbooks.com

FINALISTS (in no particular order)
• **The Bookman**
715 Washington Ave
Grand Haven, MI 49417
616-846-3520
bookmanbookstore.indielite.org
• **Bookbug & this is a bookstore**
3019 Oakland Dr
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
269-385-2847
bookbugkalamazoo.com

CANNABIS

★ **WINNER**
FLURESH CANNABIS PROVISIONING CENTER
1213 Phillips Ave SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49507
616-208-9934
fluresh.com

★ **WINNER**
LUME CANNABIS CO. — KALAMAZOO, MI
3406 Stadium Dr
Kalamazoo, MI 49008

★ **WINNER**
NORTHERN SPECIALTY HEALTH
902 Razorback Dr
Houghton, MI 49331
906-523-5122
northernspecialtyhealth.com

GROCERY, WINE & SPIRITS

★ **WINNER**
HORROCKS MARKET
4455 Breton Rd SE
Kentwood, MI 49508

FINALISTS (in no particular order)
• **Horrocks Farm Market**
7420 W Saginaw Hwy
Lansing, MI 48917
• **Frank's Market**
1021 Fulton St W
Grand Rapids, MI 49504

HEALTH, PERSONAL CARE &

★ **WINNER**
GR SPORTS MASSAGE
950 28th St SE
Bldg E, STE 201
Grand Rapids, MI 49508

FINALISTS (in no particular order)
• **Tondue Medical Spa**
715 Washington Ave
Bay City, MI 48708
989-598-8001
tonduemedspa.com
• **Design 1 Salon Spa — Grandville**
4693 Wilson Ave SW
STE F
Grandville, MI 49418
616-301-1400
design1.com

HOME, OFFICE, & ELECTRONICS

★ **WINNER**
LANGLOIS FURNITUE
3000 Henry St
Muskegon, MI 49441
231-733-2528
langloisstore.com

★ **WINNER**
STONESTHROW
1428 Plainfield Ave NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49505
stonestrowliving.com

FINALISTS (in no particular order)
• **Blended Furniture Market**
730 Seminole Rd
Norton Shores, MI 49441
231-780-2282
blendedfurnituremarket.com

JEWELRY

★ **WINNER**
SANBORN'S JEWELERS
821 W Broadway Ave
Muskegon, MI 49441
231-733-2044
sanbornsjewelers.com



FINALISTS (in no particular order)
• **J. Morgan Ltd. Fine Jewelers**
119 Washington Ave
Grand Haven, MI 49417
616-842-9300
• **La Jolla Fine Jewelry**
111 S Main St
Chelsea, MI 48118
734-475-0717
lajollafinejewelers.com

SPECIALTY STORES

★ **WINNER**
TLAQUEPAQUE GARDEN ART
109 Washington Ave
Grand Haven, MI 49417
616-850-0444

FINALISTS (in no particular order)
• **Art Cats Gallery**
1845 Lakeshore Dr
Muskegon, MI 49441
231-755-7606
artcatsgallery.com
• **Bongos Popcorn**
300 E 1st St
Flint, MI 48502



1 more reason to Buy Nearby in 2022

SPONSORED Michigan Retailers Association

For many shoppers, there's something special about entering a brick-and-mortar store. Something nostalgic about walking the aisles and looking at all the items on the shelves. Something exciting about finding just the thing you need – and discovering things you didn't even know you wanted, until you saw them with your own eyes and held them in your own hands.

Instead of a toilsome task to be completed, shopping becomes more of an adventure to enjoy when you Buy Nearby.

"It's just really fun to shop...just kind of come here and browse," said Heather Palaszek, a shopper at The Sweet Tooth in downtown Rockford, near Grand Rapids.

Palaszek was talking about shopping for fresh popcorn and other treats at the old-time candy store in her hometown. But she might just as well have been talking about shopping for refrigerators or jewelry or picture frames at small, local retailers anywhere across Michigan.

We often think of Michigan's small, local retailers as places to get quality products and knowledgeable customer service. And that's certainly true. They're the places we know that we should shop, both because the experience is often better for us and because keeping our money local is better for our communities and our state as a whole.

What we sometimes overlook when thinking about Michigan's local retailers, however, is how incredibly diverse they are. Part of the fun of buying nearby is encountering the wide variety of products and services available right in your own neck of the woods – not to mention the many different people right in your community who provide those products and services with professional expertise.

That diversity is just one more reason to Buy Nearby in 2022.

"If you're happy with the product and the service and the overall experience, it's a no brainer (to Buy Nearby)," said Tom Lamancusa, vice president of Nawara Brothers Home Store, which offers a range of appliances, electronics, furniture and other home goods on the west side of Grand Rapids.

"Why would you go back to less and a poorer experience?"

Just as Michigan's local retailers offer an extraordinary breadth of products and services, they've also weathered the

ongoing pandemic in a variety of ways. For example, Nawara Brothers has seen a surge in demand as people have spent more time at home and updated their kitchen or entertainment setups. The business is working hard to keep items in stock and, despite continued supply chain disruptions, Nawara has its largest inventory ever.

Likewise, MercuryHead Gallery on the southeast side of Grand Rapids has seen an uptick in traffic through the pandemic as more people have sought custom framing of mirrors, artwork and other items while remodeling their homes. Just as it's fun for customers to explore everything MercuryHead offers, it's been a joy for the gallery to meet people's unique needs through the pandemic.

"The arts always bring people together and create a sense of community, and I think that if there's going to be an upside to the pandemic it's that people realize how much more they appreciate community and small businesses," said Laury Baker, gallery manager.

Meanwhile, the onset of the pandemic posed a challenge at some local Michigan retailers such as DeVries Jewelers in northwest Grand Rapids. While Michigan's initial shelter-in-place order in Spring 2020 was tough to endure, the break gave the 120-year-old family business time to upgrade a few things.

Now, for the past year-and-a-half, business has been booming – in large part because buying nearby is really the best way to shop for jewelry.

"I think it's trust," owner Dan DeVries said. "We're still in a business where you need to pick it up, you need to see it, you need to touch it, you need to feel it. If you're dropping off your mom's diamond ring to be sized or worked on, you're going to leave that with a place that you trust."

Trust, a sense of community and a positive overall shopping experience are three big reasons it's best to Buy Nearby. Of course, sometimes buying an item

online from an out-of-state company is convenient. And that's okay. A resolution to Buy Nearby doesn't have to be all or nothing.

In fact, shifting just one of every 10 e-commerce purchases from an out-of-state vendor to a local Michigan retailer makes a huge difference for communities across our state. It generates \$2 billion in increased economic activity, supporting jobs and wages for our friends and neighbors.



Not just jobs and wages in retail, but also in many other sectors that are indirectly supported by retail sales including cleaning services, security, legal, accounting and more.

On top of all those great benefits for our community and state, buying nearby is good for you, too. As Palaszek said while checking out popcorn at The Sweet Tooth, sometimes shopping is just about having fun.

"People just want to be happy," store owner Tracie Riebschleger said. "And when you come in here, it's hard not to be happy."

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— BIG —
Shop
— SMALL —**



Michigan beach towns:
This city’s natural beauty
extends beyond the
breakwater

SPONSORED South Haven Visitor Bureau

For days on end, the legendary golf architect Arthur Hills hiked the grounds of what he would design into the award-winning 18 holes at HawksHead Links Golf Course in South Haven and soaked in the property’s natural beauty.

The experience for guests at the course – and elsewhere in the area surrounding the Lake Michigan beach town – can be similar, according to Greg Ruppert, whose family opened and has owned HawksHead for 25 years.

“We’re kind of in the catbird seat here,” said Ruppert. “South Haven is this quaint little town, but there’s so much to do and to experience. There are obviously the great beaches that we’re known for, but there’s more than that. The downtown is really cool, there are unique restaurants and so many outdoor opportunities.

“It’s not too far from Chicago or South Bend or Grand Rapids. South Haven makes for a great place for a getaway or an adventure.”

That respite from life’s demands can include golfing at any of the eight area courses, a day charter fishing on the big lake, planting a towel in the sand at popular and off-the-beaten path beaches or hitting multi-purpose trails for a hike, a bike ride or a leisurely river paddling outing.

South Haven’s dedication to outdoor recreation has been recognized by the state, which designated the region as a Pure Michigan Trail Town in 2019. The state Department of Natural Resources and Travel Michigan honored the community for its 48 miles of hiking and biking trails, 91 miles of kayaking and canoeing trails, 770 acres of nature preserves and 11 miles of horseback riding trails.

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2022
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SPONSORED South Haven Visitor Bureau

On the trail(s)

The Van Buren Trail State Park and the Kal-Haven Trail State Park combine to serve as one of the true gems of Michigan’s outdoor network. The Kal-Haven Trail State Park runs 33.5 miles between Kalamazoo and South Haven on converted railroad tracks, giving users scenic views of hardwood forests, farms and wetlands.

It’s the Van Buren portion that truly stands out with 14 miles of trail, including a 2.5-mile spur that leads guests to lakeside sand dunes, and also offers a bonus stop of the 18-hole SHARA Disc Golf Park along the way. The course, which is open year-round from dawn until dusk, is both challenging for experienced players and suitable for first-timers.

Back at the golf course, Ruppert says in recent years he is seeing more and more families taking advantage of the prime outdoor season to make memories. Golf and food are often central activities to do that, he said.

“Golf is becoming a cool sport again because everyone can do it,” Ruppert said. “It can be intimidating, and you can struggle, but (one good hole later) you can’t wait to get out again.”

On the water

The family-friendly atmosphere in South Haven is also witnessed by Chad Bard, a third-generation captain whose family has two charter fishing boats, a 40-passenger tour boat that offers daytime and sunset cruises and the 14-passenger speed boat named “Stormin.”

Charter fishing is a one-of-a-kind experience in South Haven, which has more than a dozen experienced captains who specialize in landing lake trout in early summer and salmon later in the year.

“This is a world-class fishery that is at your fingertips,” he said. “It’s a lot of fun, it’s very friendly, very easy-going and definitely something everyone should do at some point.”

Meanwhile, “Stormin,” Bard said, will get guests’ adrenaline running in a different way. Twin 315-horsepower engines are a new way to see the coastline, Bard said.

“It’s a blast,” he said. “There’s nothing like it and nothing faster from Michigan City up to the (Mackinac) Bridge.”

Refuel and recharge

After a day in the sun, South Haven visitors can count on grabbing chef-curated meals and craft beverages at restaurants that include small plate, farm-to-table fare, authentic Italian dining, and traditional burger and pizza joints. Ruppert, whose family also owns the downtown destination Clementine’s, said the dining scene is vibrant and diverse in South Haven.

“(Everyone) takes pride in their food,” he said. “We’re trying to use top-of-the-line ingredients, fresh fish, local produce and then to keep the menus fresh by rotating seasonally.

“South Haven has more than meets the eye.”



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Michigan's Best Local Eats:

Gull Lake Distilling Co. offers seasonal spirits, expansive beer garden

KALAMAZOO COUNTY, MI
When Lindsey and T.J. Koch decided to open Gull Lake Distilling Company a few years back they hoped that they would be able fill a void in the region.

“Obviously there’s a lot more breweries around Kalamazoo than there are distilleries. Breweries are kind of a dime a dozen these days,” Lindsey Koch said. “And while distilleries are starting to pop up more and more across the state, we wanted to bring a distillery to the community with a real beer garden atmosphere.”

Now, the garden is beginning to take shape as originally envisioned, offering a happy hour and night out destination that abuts the Kalamazoo Valley Bike Trail and is a stone’s throw from the Kalamazoo River, allowing kayakers to dock and get out on site. The dog-friendly beer garden, which hosts a variety of private events from weddings to graduations and special events like yoga meetups, is complete with cornhole and live entertainment throughout the summer months.

And as the Kochs approach their two-year anniversary of in-person dining at the distillery on June 8, expansion plans are already in full swing.

The distilling company, which specializes in a wide variety of craft spirits and small batch craft beers, just recently acquired the former Pizza King kitchen, which had been located at the until-recently shared property at 92 E. Michigan Ave. in Galesburg where the distillery sits.

The acquisition, Lindsey Koch said, will allow them to expand their menu beyond their current offerings of Sunday brunch, burgers

and sandwiches, beer cheese and pretzels and weekly steak dinners. Koch said she doesn’t have a date when the new kitchen will be fully operable but expects it will be sometime this summer.

And while the full kitchen is not yet in play, patrons still have brunch options available each Sunday from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. such as avocado toast, waffles, eggs benedict with homemade hollandaise sauce and Canadian bacon and breakfast burgers topped with bacon and eggs. All eggs and beef are locally sourced from

Sheets Farms in Galesburg, while the Brioche buns used for the burgers come from the Michigan Bread Company, T.J. Koch said.

The lunch and dinner menu at the distillery are highlighted by burgers such as the stuffed beer cheese burger, smoked gouda burger, and Triple B, which consists of a house-made bourbon whiskey BBQ sauce, bacon, crispy onion straws and American cheese. Sandwiches such as pulled pork, blackened chicken and pickled grilled cheese are also available as are Chicago, Coney and BBQ Bacon dogs for hot dog lovers.

Known for its spirits, such as its horseradish vodka — perfect for a Bloody Mary or two — and its barrel-aged gin, which is aged in bourbon barrels, as well its barrel-aged rum that is aged in maple syrup bourbon barrels, about 80% of guests opt for cocktails over the distillery’s craft beer options, she said.

Among the most popular is the aged Article 15 Bourbon Whiskey, which gets its name from a type of military punishment that might be levied if someone returns to base under the influence of too much alcohol or has been drinking underage, T.J. Koch said.

Cocktails change with the seasons at Gull Lake Distilling Co. giving summertime guests the chance to enjoy drinks such as the Porch Swing, made up of vodka, apple brandy and a choice of pomegranate or cranberry — or the Crescent Tea, which consists of apple brandy, peach, and iced tea.

Beers, crafted by Ben Bennett, are in steady rotation and with the exception of the flagship Alesburg Blonde Ale, there are likely to be different options on tap each week.

For those who aren’t keen on cocktails or beer, there’s also house-made wine and hard seltzer, the latter of which is not flavored until it comes out of the keg and then is muddled like a cocktail with simple syrup and fresh fruit, giving it a crisper, fresher flavor than the average hard seltzer.

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Thank you to all for nominating MY BEES NEST L.L.C and myself for the Reader’s Choice Award and thanks to @Trueheart Photos. Without you, none of this could have been possible. I hope to continue to bring you honey, happiness, and a smile that lasts a lifetime.



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