

# The Business

thebusiness@chicagoreader.com

## Endangered Horses? Travels of the Popes? Cheap Sex?

Magazine and memorabilia shop owner Robert Katzman has it all—at least for the time being.

By Deanna Isaacs

Robert M. Katzman first showed up in the pages of the *Reader* back in 1977. He was the 27-year-old owner of three newsstands and an upstart periodicals-distribution company who had taken on the giant Charles Levy Circulating Company in a David-and-Goliath antitrust suit that lasted four years and ended with Levy buying him out. Katzman's next business was the Grand Tour World Travel Bookstore on North Clark, which he acquired just before the national chains came to town. (The store closed in November 1994.) And for the last 15 years he's been running Magazine Memories and Poster Planet, vintage magazine and poster stores that grew out of a periodical collection he started the day John F. Kennedy was killed. The two businesses occupy a double storefront in a strip mall on Dempster in Morton Grove.

But over the last five years, Katzman says, things have been "evolving precariously." Internet dealers have been eating his lunch. His wife—a major contributor to the family budget—developed a debilitating illness and lost her job. Katzman underwent a pair of brain surgeries, bringing the total of his surgical ordeals—which began when he was 18 and lost half his jaw to cancer—to 29. In financial straits, he put his suburban home on the market this fall but failed to find a buyer. Now his mortgage company has foreclosed; he has until the first week of January to move out. He also has to get out of Poster Planet because he can't afford to rent the two spaces anymore. His 20,000 "posters"—many of them pages or covers from vintage magazines—are on sale at half price through the end of the year, when he'll somehow shrink back to a single space.

On the other hand, Katzman says, he's closer than ever to achieving his longtime fantasy of becoming a famous writer. He's self-published two volumes of his life story, *Fighting Words*, and reports with no little satisfaction that his old nemesis, Barnes & Noble, has just ordered 100 copies for regional distribution. The first volume, *I'm Not Dead... Yet*, came out last year; the second,



Robert Katzman at Magazine Memories

*Escaping and Embracing the Cops of Chicago*, which begins with a story about undercover police mistaking him for an Arab burglary suspect and beating the shit out of him until he recites a prayer in

Hebrew, is hot off the press. He's sold about 700 copies of the two books so far on his own, peddling them at signings and lectures, and discovered along the way that he's got a talent for inspirational

speaking. If his career as a great undiscovered writer and talker ever takes off, he says, he'll kiss the store good-bye.

Magazine Memories without Katzman is unimaginable. Beginning with a cluttered window display of posters, signs, and life-size cardboard celebrities (Betty Boop hanging out with Christina Aguilera) that makes it a challenge just to find the door, it's a claustrophobic maze. Once inside you're caught in a fluorescent-lit warren of hulking raw wood shelving stuffed with plastic-

### Public Art Watchdog Still Watching

"I had to do it," attorney Scott Hodes says of his new lawsuit against the city over its public art procedures. "They weren't doing what they're supposed to do." Hodes, who settled a similar suit last May, filed again on November 17, claiming that the city's Department of Cultural Affairs hasn't complied with all the terms of the settlement agreement. Hodes charges that the Project Advisory

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bagged issues of *Esquire*, *Newsweek*, and every copy of *Life* ever printed times six or eight. Katzman built the too-tall shelves himself, for "majesty," he says ("the eye sweeps up") and hand printed the lemonade-stand-style cardboard signs, which flag categories like "Tet Offensive," "Cheap Sex," and "New Yorker Football Covers." You can browse the shrink-wrapped posters ("Endangered Horses," "Popes: Deaths, Travels") but only Katzman can remove the magazines from their baggies—if you want to take a closer look at any of them, you'll have to do it with his help. He carries the 100,000-magazine inventory in his head and knows exactly which shelf or bin in his crammed space has that vintage copy of *Literary Digest*, *American Cookery*, or *Teen Super Star* you're after. While he's escorting you to it you're likely to get a dose of his get-up, start-over, don't-quit philosophy or a sales pitch for the autobiography, strategically positioned for point-of-sale impact next to the cash register. The books are 20 bucks each; no charge yet for the pep talk.

Panel, which makes recommendations to the Public Art Committee, has failed to keep detailed minutes of its meetings, post agendas and minutes in a timely way, identify individual members' votes, or describe procedures and selection guidelines. According to the complaint, "the City's use of a slide registry for the selection of artists, which it describes as a 'form of open competition'... is nothing more than an intentionally misleading and deceptive effort" to evade the mandated disclosure. Robert S. Atkins is acting as Hodes's lead lawyer and Jay E. Stewart of the Better Government Association is serving as cocounsel.

### Miscellany

Guess it looks better when they win: The Chicago Bears and the Chicago Park District were among the Chicago Architecture Foundation's recently announced Patron of the Year award recipients, for their role in the Soldier Field and North Burnham Park Redevelopment. ☐

I paint my own reality.  
The only thing I know  
is that I paint  
because I need to,  
and I paint whatever  
passes through my  
head without  
any other  
consideration.

- Frida Kahlo -

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## What are you doing?

The Reader's Guide to New Year's Eve

Available in the paper and online

December 16



# Restaurants

Listings are excerpted from the Reader Restaurant Finder, an online database of more than 3,000 Chicago-area restaurants. Restaurants are rated by more than 2,200 Reader Restaurant Raters, who feed us information and comments on their dining experiences. Web ratings are updated daily; print listings reflect the most current information available at publication time. Reviews are written by

Reader staff and contributors and (where noted) individual Raters. Though reviewers try to reflect the Restaurant Raters' input, reviews should be considered one person's opinion; the collective Raters' opinions are best expressed in the numbers. The complete listings and information on how to become a Reader Restaurant Rater are available at [www.chicagoreader.com/restaurantfinder](http://www.chicagoreader.com/restaurantfinder).

## Taste Test

# Five Soups in Seven Days

# R

## Go Ahead, Slurp Your Supper

### Restaurants with recommended soups

#### A & T Restaurant

7036 N. Clark | 773-274-0036

\$

AMERICAN, BREAKFAST, BURGERS | BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS

#### SOUP: CHICKEN

Every time I've eaten at the A & T (for "Abundant and Tasty") I've asked what the soups were, only to choose the chicken, and it's never failed me. It's always slightly different—sometimes more cloudy, sometimes more golden, sometimes more briny, sometimes more oniony, sometimes with a little more fat floating on top. On a cold winter afternoon, divested of some of its abundant noodles and with a few squishy rolls and butter on the side, it is manna. The rest of the fare at this neighborhood place covers the classics, but with no real weak spots. Among the best bets are the all-day breakfasts—a gargantuan demilune omelet with feta, olives, and tomatoes; off-the-bone grilled ham with buttery scrambled eggs. Frankly, I've never had anything bad at the A & T. Just ask for your hash browns crispy. **Elizabeth M. Tamny**

#### Biasetti's

1625 W. Irving Park | 773-281-4442

\$\$\$

ITALIAN, STEAKS/LOBSTER, BARBECUE/RIBS | LUNCH: FRIDAY-SUNDAY; DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL 11:30, MONDAY-THURSDAY TILL 11

#### SOUP: SPLIT PEA

Until four years ago Biasetti's was the same restaurant my friend Dolores used to go to with her family in the 50s: a great neighborhood steak house, not expensive, the kind of place where NFL helmets were lined up in profile above the bar and surrounded by Christmas lights year-round. The house salad was iceberg lettuce with a couple of croutons and beet slices thrown on. Then the Ko family sold the business, and hundreds of regulars like me held our breath. The current owner, Terry Lyons, has redecorated, killing the kitsch but somehow keeping the feel of the old Biasetti's. They still bring you the great antipasto plate when you sit, with olives, cukes, radishes, and cherry peppers. Stan Zimmerman, a sweet-heart of a guy, still plays keyboards and sings standards at the bar Thursday through Saturday. And the best thing on the menu is still the ribs: sweet and slightly crisp on the outside, perfectly tender when you bite in, delivered to your table in a slab like carryout from *The Flintstones*. I'm a vegetarian who eats meat only at Biasetti's,

When I was little and hammered by the flu, my mom always put me on a strict diet of flat 7-Up, saltines, and Campbell's chicken noodle soup. It's a prescription I've followed up to now whenever I've got (in her words) the collywobbles, but with the onset of flu season and the weather getting nasty, I started wondering about more appealing medicinal options.

I used to frequent **AMITABUL**, Chicago's only vegan Korean restaurant, back in the 90s when it was on Southport, but it had fallen off my radar since moving to far-northwest-side Norwood Park six years ago. When I trekked out to the tranquil storefront cafe on a dreary Sunday evening I was

burdened by nothing worse than a mild hangover, but I was hoping a bowl of **DR. K'S CURE ALL NOODLE SOUP** would put me back in fighting trim. Touted as a remedy for colds, flu, sore throats, and, yes, hangovers, the spicy concoction was created by chef Dave Choi (who also owns Jim's Grill) for frequent customer Linda Krinsky, a chiropractor with severe allergies. For \$7.95 you get a steaming bowl of tofu, seaweed, your choice of rice or wheat noodles, and veggies—carrots, broccoli, mushrooms, bean sprouts, zucchini—in a miso broth laced with sinus-clearing doses of cayenne and garlic. Amitabul also offers a "flu soup" of kimchi, garlic, bean sprouts, and tofu in a miso broth. Interestingly, Korean researchers recently announced that they'd successfully treated chickens infected with avian flu with a diet of kimchi, a cure that may have something to do with high levels of lactic acid in the fermented cabbage.

Two days later with temperatures plummeting, I was ready for another pick-me-up. The **SAAM GAE TANG**, or chicken ginseng soup, at **SSYAL GINSENG HOUSE** has been praised for its restorative powers on

the culinary chat site LTHForum.com, and I was excited to try it for myself. I finally made it to the super-bright storefront on Lawrence at 9 PM, and I don't know if the problem was the late hour, my obvious saam gae tang virginity, or the substantial language barrier, but the soup the very kind waitress brought me seemed a distant relation to the "opaque, earthy-smelling potion" described in a 1997 *Tribune* story. As promised, it's a good-size iron pot of literally boiling broth in the middle of which simmers a whole small, naked chicken. The chest cavity of the bird is stuffed with a wad of sticky rice and a couple of tasty red dates, but the broth itself tasted like, well, boiled chicken water with a slightly twiggy aftertaste. After digging around in the bottom of the pot I dislodged a three-inch log of ginseng root and a mushy garlic clove, and I tried to jazz things up with green onions and

that's how good they are (though the management recently added a couple of pasta items for your non-meat-eating companions). The salad's still the same. After 10 or 15 visits, you look forward to it. **Ira Glass**

#### Bistro Campagne

4518 N. Lincoln | 773-271-6100

F 8.3 | S 7.8 | A 8.1 | \$\$\$ (26 REPORTS)

FRENCH | DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | SMOKE FREE

#### SOUP: FRENCH ONION

☘☘☘ There's nothing groundbreaking here, but Bistro Campagne remains a reliable choice for classic French fare. The

kitchen places a premium on organic ingredients; even the wine list has nine or so bottles from sustainably farmed vineyards. The menu offers bistro standards such as French onion soup ("the best I've ever had," say many Raters), mussels, and a brandade of salt cod and peekytoe crab; entrees include steak frites, leg of lamb, and pan-seared duck breast with braised artichokes. Escargots, delivered spitting hot, are prepared with a garlic-Pernod butter and a liberal dusting of bread crumbs for a sort of "snails casino" effect. A six-inch roast trout was stuffed with aromatic herbs de Provence, wrapped with a cummerbund of serrano ham, and

served over roasted asparagus. The ham rounded out the surprisingly mild fish, giving the flaky-yet-chewy meat a degree of sweetness and heft. Roast chicken, crispy on the outside and juicy within, was served over a bed of rich mushroom ragout and topped with a crazy blossom of fried onion. For dessert there's a creamy creme brulee, pot au chocolat, or perhaps a seasonal tart. The cozy, Prairie-inflected dining rooms are comfortable and inviting, but in the summer the lush country garden, tucked away from Lincoln Avenue traffic behind a sturdy wooden fence, is hands down the place to be. **Martha Bayne**

#### Cafe Hoang

1010 W. Argyle | 773-878-9943

\$

VIETNAMESE, THAI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | RESERVATIONS NOT ACCEPTED | BYO

#### SOUP: PHO TAI (BEEF NOODLE)

With its neon-choked front window and dingy mirrored walls, Cafe Hoang looks trashier than the New York Dolls. But the variety and freshness of the ingredients is top-notch. Pho tai—the best on Argyle, some say—is generous on the herbs and Chinese celery, with a broth that's not too sweet from marrow. Bowls of thin



Dr. K's Cure All Noodle Soup at Amitabul

an unhealthy dose of salt, but even as the tender hen disintegrated in the bowl the whole thing remained resolutely bland. More stimulating were the accompanying *panchan* (traditional Korean side dishes), including kimchi, daikon, bitter sea greens, and tiny dried silver fish.

The next night I dragged a friend to Argyle Street for pho, the Vietnamese staple that comforts many a Chicagoan in the dead of winter. At **PHO 888**, steps from the Red Line tracks, we feasted on the restaurant's signature dish, **PHO DAC BIET**. It's a huge, steaming

bowl of rice noodles in beef broth in which float pieces of thinly sliced flank steak and eye of round, plus brisket, a gnarly hunk of tendon, and several unnerving ribbons of bible tripe. The broth is light and delicately nuanced; you can dress it to taste with sprigs of fresh mint and basil, jalapenos, lime, and hot chile sauce. By the time I was done messing with it the soup had developed a complex body and tang, an intoxicating aroma, and an unfortunate gray-green tinge. At \$5.45 it's a mad bargain.

When the kimchi-bird flu story broke in the States, sales of sauerkraut went through the roof, with some stores in the midwest reporting spikes of 850 percent. Inspired, I stopped at **PODHALANKA**—an oasis of Polish home cooking in Wicker Park—late in the week for a bowl of **CABBAGE SOUP** (\$2.60). Hot

**Podhalanka Polska Restauracja**  
1549 W. Division  
773-486-6655

might be too strong for a fragile stomach, but as preventive medicine? Well, I haven't gotten sick yet.

The next day I wrapped up with a trip to Lakeview to try the **MISH-MASH SOUP** at the **BAGEL**. The curative powers of chicken soup are a source of ongoing debate: some advance the view that it's a cellular anti-inflammatory, others hold that an amino acid in chicken skin soothes the respiratory tract, and still others think the benefits are purely psychological.

**The Bagel**  
3107 N. Broadway  
773-479-0300

Regardless, huge bowls of the "Jewish penicillin" appeared to be the order du jour at the busy diner; one \$6.95 portion is enough to soothe a whole sick family. The everything bagel of chicken soup, it includes noodles, rice, kasha, one doughy kreplach, and a matzo ball the size of a regulation baseball; for \$8 it's available by the half gallon to go. But though I'm fond of the concept, the multitude of starches jostling in the bottom of the bowl can be a little overwhelming. Fortunately, the Bagel also offers plain old chicken noodle. —**Martha Bayne**

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