

Second Front

Boone Life | Contentment in the county



In his element, Michael Dodson shimmies to the music of the band Straight Arrow on the Back Door Lounge dance floor Friday night. "I come here every weekend. There's always good times, and you can't beat the music," he said. The Back Door Lounge, located at the Midway Travel Plaza, draws colorful crowds every Friday night with its live country music.

Neon-lit honky-tonk

Photo and story by Zachary Siebert

MIDWAY — For those traveling west on Interstate 70, and having just breached the outer limits of Columbia, the Midway Travel Plaza shines bright in the cold February night before motorists plunge into the Missouri River valley and the dark expanse between the college town and Kansas City.

Like the Western trader stations and outposts where dusty wanderers would leave their weapons and traders would stock up on their way in and out of town, the Midway Travel Plaza embodies the spirit of the American travel experience.

With a restaurant, laundromat, boot shop and lounge, it is more like a town than a filling station. And the "town" is better appreciated after sunset, when the day's concerns give way to the evening's pleasures. When the Back Door Lounge upstairs turns on its neon beer signs, the country music starts blaring and the dance floor becomes a stable of commotion.

No one will ever accuse the Back Door Lounge of putting on airs.

Beyond the reach of Columbia's ban on smoking, the air is a thick fog of tobacco smoke made colorful by red and blue light radiating from numerous neon signs spelling out "Busch" and "Miller Time."

The bar is full of cowboy-hat- and denim-clad folks drinking bottled beer under a handwritten sign advertising the night's special: \$1 cherry Jell-O shots. If this were New York, it could be mistaken for a costume party, but it is not. This is Midway, and it is authentic.

After the jukebox gets a workout playing old country music standbys, a band of local boys takes the stage. Immediately, the smoky air is pulsating with versions of Johnny Cash and Randy Travis.

Couples and cowboys alike rush to the dance floor.

Suddenly, the truck stop lounge is a vivacious roadhouse of stomping boots and hoots of pleasure. There's no place they'd rather be than upstairs at the honky-tonk west of town off the highway.



Boone Life is a photo column that explores the small ways people find contentment in Boone County. If you have suggestions, please contact Kyle Spradley at kjs4g2@mizzou.edu or 882-5732.

MORE ONLINE: For additional Boone Life photos, go to ColumbiaMissourian.com and click on "Lifestyles."

Local chef among the Midwest's best

Sycamore head chef Mike Odette is a semifinalist for a James Beard Award.

By ANNIE HILDEBRANDT
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Chef Mike Odette, co-owner and head chef at the Sycamore in Columbia, is one of 25 semifinalists for a James Beard Award in the Best Chef: Midwest category.

Winners of James Beard Awards, deemed "the Oscars of the food world" by Time magazine, are the who's who of the culinary world.

"This would change my life," Odette said. "Many winners have gone on to be household names. It's a career milestone to even be in the running for it."

Odette, who has worked at the Sycamore since its opening in 2005, said the nomination was unexpected and a tremendous thrill.

"I have no idea who would have nominated me, but we've got our fans, folks that like us and look out for us," Odette said.

Online ballots will be distributed to more than 400 judges, and finalists will be announced on March 23. In the meantime, Odette is just going to continue with what he does best.

"I like to keep preparations simple, let ingredients speak for themselves and let the appealing qualities of ingredients stand out," Odette said of his cooking philosophy.

Given the opportunity to impress the judges with a specific dish, Odette said he would serve them a braised pork belly that's been cured for a couple days, slow-cooked in broth and served with apple and cabbage slaw.

One Kansas City restaurant and five other Missouri chefs — two from Kansas City and three from St. Louis — were also recognized.

Petition calls for secretary of arts

More than 233,600 signatures are part of the online petition.

By MARY JUHL
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For 20 years, Nina Loory of Columbia danced ballet at the historic Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. After a successful career in dance, Loory continued to work at the theater for 14 years before moving to the United States.

Loory, who is the artistic director of the international ballet prize Benois de la Danse, which the Bolshoi supports, knows what it's like to function as an artist in two markedly different government systems. In Russia, part of the national budget is allocated to the ministry of culture. The United States does not have a similar department. An online petition asking President Barack Obama to create a Cabinet-level secretary of arts position has gotten more than 233,600 signatures. The petition was posted after musician and producer Quincy Jones made a plea in a Novem-

ber radio interview for the creation of the position to oversee and support various activities of the national arts community.

Supporters of the petition hope that with the creation of this position, greater financial support for the arts will be available in the U.S. The Russian minister of culture supplies Benois de la Danse with half of its budget. But in Missouri, for example, Jennifer Wampler, development director for the Kansas City Ballet, said less than one half of 1 percent of the company's annual costs are covered by funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. Supporters of Jones' petition hope that by installing a secretary of arts, arts education will be promoted and supported. "One of the things that got Quincy Jones so worked up

about this is the pathetic condition of arts education in public schools," said David A. Smith, a senior lecturer at Baylor University and author of the book "Money for Art: the Tangled Web of Art and Politics in American Democracy."

"Not only are kids missing out on arts education, the message is being sent to them that the arts are expendable."

DAVID SMITH
Senior lecturer at Baylor University

Web of Art and Politics in American Democracy." "Not only are kids missing out on arts education, the message is being sent to them that the arts are expendable," Smith said.

Supporters of the petition also argue that having a secretary of arts would improve foreign relations. Loory said that during the Cold War many Russian artists, including herself, came to the U.S. to perform with hopes of easing international tension.

"You can't imagine how people greeted us," Loory said. "It was great because they could see who Russians really were,

not just the polar bears with guns, but real artists."

Robert Shay, director of the School of Music at MU, also recognizes the positive influence the arts can have in building relationships abroad. "We have to understand that art transcends language and nationality," Shay said. Still, Shay and others are concerned that centralizing the arts could be damaging.

"You can have a high level of advocacy and support for the arts without having centralization," Shay said. Smith, who recently wrote a column for The Wall Street Journal pointing out the weaknesses of a Cabinet-level arts secretary position, said the petition raises questions about the effectiveness of the current U.S. institutions that support the arts, such as the NEA. "Making the implication that the arts can be furthered in the same ways that foreign policy can, that is, via centralization, is erroneous and ultimately destructive to art," Smith said in an interview. "It would also imply that the NEA isn't doing its job correctly."