

# Meals on Wheels: The 2022 Motif Food Truck Awards cooked up a wonderful time

The Annual Motif Food Truck and Drink Awards, held on August 15, were a tasteful experience in more ways than one. Out in the gigantic parking lot of **R1 Indoor Karting** in Lincoln, a cool summer temperature kept everyone comfortable as they gathered for the event. Food was provided by a fleet of food trucks, and there were many brewers present to keep the good times going. Music was provided by **The Unlikely Strummers**, RI's all-ukulele band that crafts custom homages to food trucks and travels the state serenading them at random events, ephemeral jam band **ElectroPolitics**, which closed out the night on just the right notes, and the always reliable, surreally exuberant **Providence Drum Troupe**.

Each host announcing the winners brought a different vibe and personality to the awards, which kept things entertaining as they worked through nearly 60 awards, between the trucks and the brewers. MCs **Morgan Capodilupo**, actress, Motif food editor and Newport Vanderbilt Hotel Lead Concierge and **Ginnie Dunleavy**, Improv artist and executive director responsible for food services (and more) at RISD quipped, chased down award winners and wrangled a team of food and beverage veteran presenters, including the PVD Drum Troupe, **Corinne Southern**, food-grammer **Chef Rivoli**, Jonathan Kelly of food blog **Rhodeliscious**, burlesque queen **Bettysioux Tailor** and several ukelelans. Taking it home at the end of the night were legendary food-scene supporter **Frank Terranova** and **Michael Sabitoni**, international tour guide and chair of Food & Beverage and Travel & Tourism Studies at Johnson & Wales University.

Highlights included impressive online voting showings by rising nano-brewery Six-Pack Brewing and Lops Brewing on the brewery side, and by RaRa's tacos (oh boy, all that cheese!) and The Hot Potato, outstarching the usually unstoppable Frisky Fries in the potato competition (although Frisky brought home other coveted awards). See the full list of winners below.

After eating the goodies served by **RaRa's**, **Hot Potato**, healthy **Hometown Poke**, **Lulu's Little Pancakes** (which created a special birthday pancake for one of our Leonine MC's), visitors had a solid foundation to take in a little beer. Brand new truck **Boba Wave** was helping handle the thirsty who didn't want alcohol, and **Hook N Ladder Pizza** was kind enough to bring their fire truck, just in case any of the competition got too hot (fitting that theme, there was also a thrilling moment when the sprinklers briefly showered the band and the video village!).

On the brewer side, samples were generously served by **Buttonwoods**, **Six-Pack**, **Beer on Earth**, **Union Station**, **Narragansett Brewing**, **Shaidzon** - and **Whalers** and **Proclamation** through the **Memphis Kelle Beer Truck**. **RI Spirits** also distilled a little liquid joy for those looking for something less glutinous. With brewers from most of these establishments pouring, you could ask questions of most any kind about the origins or process producing these delectable concoctions. At the end of the evening, local performer **Corinne Southern** conducted Narragansett's "Crush it like Quint" contest, in which many a Gansett Lager can met an untimely end.

Motif is extremely grateful to all who took part, and appreciated a record high turn out both online and in person this year! And of course, thanks to the sponsors who made this possible: **R1 Indoor Karting**, **Blackstone Valley Brewing Supplies**, the **Craft Collective**, and **Ocean State Food Truck Events**.

Now, a quick summary of each of the delicious winners:

### **Burgers:**

Haven Brothers

Arguably the oldest mobile restaurant and one of the oldest woman-founded business in the United States, Haven Brothers started, horse-drawn, in 1893 and serves up American classics with burgers, hot dogs, fries and more. It's also probably the only truck on this list to star in its own feature-length documentary ([fb.com/havenbrothersmovie](https://fb.com/havenbrothersmovie)).

### **Hot Dogs & Sausages:**

Sam's NY System

Founded in 1963, Sam's NY System specializes in serving its customers hot dogs, sandwiches, gyros and more, in the Coney-Island inspired but now uniquely RI style.

### **BBQ:**

GottaQ BBQ

GottaQ's award-winning chefs specialize in smoking and cooking its traditional southern-style American barbecue in their Cumberland and Narragansett locations in addition to their food trucks, which have been known to trek cross-country to receive awards at national food truck events.

### **Cheese & Cheesesteaks:**

Championship Melt

This wrestling-themed food truck cooks up a variety of grilled cheese recipes including vegan, gluten-free and dairy-free options. And if you ever need it, they can perform the Heimlich like nobody's business.!

### **Seafood:**

Blount Clam Shack

Run by the Blount family, the Blount Clam shack Food Truck is just one component of the family's legendary RI business that has, since 1880, been offering up seafood favorites to locals and shipping them around the world.

### **Tacos; Graphics:**

RaRa's Surf Shack Beach Wagon

This Cranston-based food truck specializes in tacos, taquitos and quesadillas. It's a new name for Paco's Tacos, and RaRa's also boasts a new, non-mobile location on East St in Cranston, with a much broader and sometimes surprising menu (Asada chips? Peanut butter filled taffy?). Their special method of making Quesadillas - with a halo of fried cheese - is spectacular.

## **Latin & Caribbean Influences:**

Spanglish

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Nathalie and Raymond Rodriguez closed their restaurant La Villa Bistro. Shortly after, they applied their culinary experience to starting a mobile kitchen that serves gourmet empanadas and a menu with Spanish, American and Caribbean influences. In no time, they've become a truck that's seen and loved everywhere.

## **Asian Influence:**

Ming's Asian Street Food

Husband-and-wife duo Josh Burgoyne and Korn Suom serve up Cambodian-inspired street food that's inspired many a diner.

## **Italian Influence, Favorite New Truck:**

Hook N Ladder Pizza Co.

In early 2021, Shawn Finnigan opened Hook N Ladder Pizza Co, which serves brick oven pizza from a remodeled fire engine, made by former and current fire fighters. Flame on!

The "New Truck" award is a particularly hard-won accolade - one of our most voted on and closely contested categories this year, with so many new trucks emerging from the pit-stop of COVID.

## **Vegan/Vegetarian/Cruelty-free:**

Basil & Bunny

Using locally-sourced ingredients, Basil & Bunny provides vegan and cruelty-free options with the mission of lowering animal product dependence. But for non-vegans, you often can't even tell the difference with some of these sly, tasty menu items. No, you're not eating bunnies, you're eating rabbit food. They've just opened a non-mobile location on Wood St in Bristol (soft opening, August 8 - but the cat ... er, bunny ... is out of the bag now!)

## **Potatoes:**

The Hot Potato

Food truck serving baked potatoes. A past winner for "unique offerings," this one-of-a-kind truck offers many of your classic favorite meals, but on top of a baked potato. A particular triumph, one should note, given a current nationwide shortage of this singular vegetable.

## **Breakfast & Brunch:**

Lulu's Little Pancakes

In hindsight, we might have messed this up, as Lulu's little pancakes are definitely not just for breakfast. Just a few inches across, yet sweet and filling, these little gems can fill your cravings for a

desserty fix any time of the day. Don't hesitate to order off the menu - if they have the ingredients, they'll combine 'em for you. We think Mrs. Butterworth would be scandalized at the variety of things Lulu can do with a pancake.

### **Coffee:**

Presto Strange O Coffee Co.

Owned and operated by Jessica and Jason Case, Presto Strange O serves a variety of coffee-based beverages and accompanying snacks and treats. They've been keeping it strange all over the state for more than 10 years, and also have a tire-less cafe in Warwick.

### **Dessert:**

Black Dog Donuts

Black Dog Donuts serves fresh fried mini donuts straight from the truck. They're mini in size, not in taste - or you could also try one of their "Squad Cups," a layered trifle dessert!

### **Frozen Dessert:**

Cosmo's Fresh & Frozen Treats

Cosmo's is one of the trucks in the RaRa's fleet of affiliates, and their dessert offerings go great with Mexican. Or anything else, really. They feature some pretty fancy shakes and frozen drinks, with garnishes like fruit and gummi sharks.

### **Food Truck with Storefront:**

Friskie Fries

Taking the classic french fry to the next level, Friskie Fries provides a boatload of toppings to spice up this classic dish at both their food trucks and non-mobile locations in Johnston and in a sweet location in DownCity PVD that pays homage to their origins as a nightlife truck usually found near the Alley Cat. Their unusual approach to fries as almost a bun to hold other food - and their message of universal acceptance - have caught on with "Friskettes" around the state.

### **All-Weather Warrior:**

Farm to Sandwich

Brother-in-laws Brian and Marc started this food truck after losing their jobs to the pandemic. Using locally-sourced ingredients, Farm to Sandwich strives to make "the best food you can wrap your hands around." They're known among their peers for working it through all the weather conditions - shoveling their truck out in snowstorms, enduring hail or sleet, getting that sandwich to you no matter what.

### **Other Ethnic:**

The Ish

To reflect the owner's cultural background, The Ish serves up favorite Irish and Polish cuisine.

### **Location/Festival:**

Food Truck Friday at Carousel Village

Every Friday during spring and summer, this FoodTrucksIn festival showcases over 15 food trucks at the Roger Williams Park Zoo Carousel Village, with a companion beer garden, some live tunes and an abundance of kids activities, from swan boats to playgrounds, movies to the carousel. It's the granddaddy of weekly food truck nights.

### **Pop-Up:**

Sarcastic Sweets

With a storefront in Seekonk, MA, sarcastic sweets take their dessert and smoothie treats on the road with their food truck serving Massachusetts and Rhode Island as well as the wider New England area. They also do in-store and in-brewery pop-ups with custom recipes. (We're still waiting for their return to Smug brewery, where certain brews became part of the mini-donut batter. No kidding.)

### **Portable Not-Quite-Truck:**

Tricycle Ice Cream

Dave Cass and Giovanni Salvador started their ice cream cart on wheels back in 2014. Their mission? "To perfect the ice cream sandwich." In 2019, they also opened a storefront in PVD, definitively leaving the training wheels behind - but not their vintage, iconic three-wheeled cart.

### **Outdoor Treat:**

Three Sisters (Hope St, PVD)

Three Sisters began in 2005 from the mind of owner Michael Stern. Starting out serving just ice cream and coffee, it has evolved into an ice cream parlor-cafe-restaurant hybrid of sorts now serving a variety of breakfast and lunch entrees to the hungry folks on the East Side of PVD.

### **Locally Manufactured Food:**

Del's Lemonade

With roots in 1840s Italy, Del's lemonade was created by Angelo DeLucia in 1948 in Cranston. It soon included a mobile component and became a staple of Rhode Island with several franchises worldwide, and a pioneer in the field of frozen lemonade. It almost feels unfair to include them in this category, where they completely dominated the voting.

### **New RI Food Product:**

#### **PVD Pies:**

In the early, uncertain days of the pandemic, Gina Herlihy started PVD Pies in the space that used to

house the Duck & Bunny bakery in Hope Artiste Village, Pawtucket. Two years later, this shop serves a wide variety of sweet and savory options with takeaway and delivery options.

**Farmer's Market:**

Farm Fresh RI (PVD)

Farm Fresh RI is an organization dedicated to education, production and access to locally-sourced food in Rhode Island. They run several farmer's markets including a year-round one in Providence hosting a wide variety of vendors at their spacious new digs on Sims Ave.