

The votes are in

Readers pick Valley's best

By Elizabeth Hartigan

Daily News Staff Writer

Did you hear the one about the Valley girl who loved the Valley?

"The Valley is at the center of everything I need," said Denise Haiston.

But she wasn't joking. She likes the Valley. That's right, the boring, ugly, not unsophisticated Valley. "I tried to live in Arizona, and it didn't work. I left after a week," said the 20-year-old, who was born in Van Nuys and now lives in Sun Valley.

Haiston is not the Valley's only fan. In a write-in survey, she and 271 other Daily News readers pointed out what the Valley does best — the best food and drink, best entertainment, best shops and best sports spots.

"You can get most anything in the Valley," said Elizabeth Yates, 68, who has lived here all her life. She said she and her husband, who are both retired, enjoy the Valley's simple pleasures — the shopping, the inexpensive restaurants, the parks. "We love to sit out in the evening, in nice weather, and watch the stars coming out."

Several stars became visible in the Daily News' informal poll. (Readers left some categories blank, so votes do not usually add up to 272.)

Haiston, along with 46 others, said the best burgers come from In-N-Out Burgers. "They're real greasy and cheesy, and they're inexpensive, and they're real fast," she said.

In-N-Out fries its burgers on a grill, using fresh meat — never frozen — and fresh lettuce and tomatoes. "We do cook to order, and we specialize just in hamburgers. The customers know the difference," said Rich Snyder, president, Ozzi's Restaurant (20 votes) and Tommy's Burgers (16) came in second and third.

More flavors, more votes

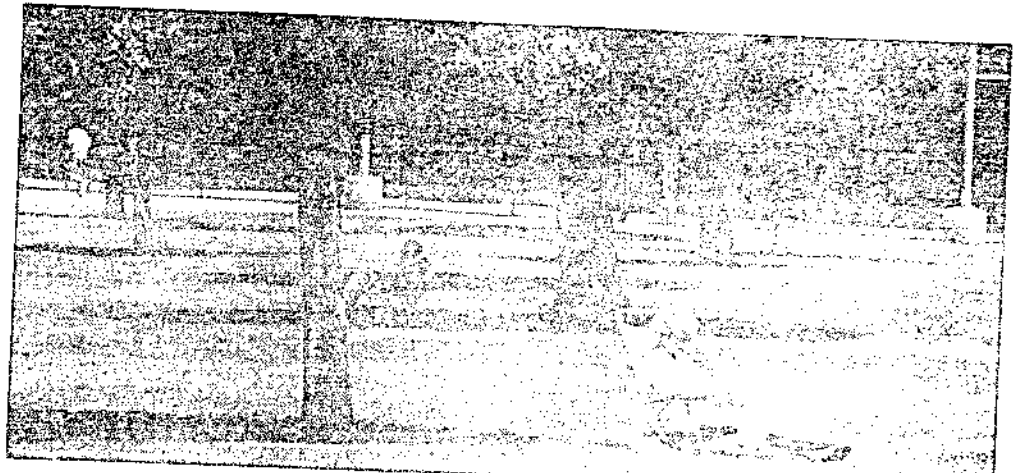
Baskin-Robbins 31 Ice Cream, with four new exotic flavors, including chocolate raspberry truffle, almond amaretto, grand marnier and cappuccino chip, serves the best ice cream, according to 35 readers. Baskin-Robbins narrowly beat out the Haagen-Dazs Ice Cream Shoppe chain, which took 29 votes. "We have more flavors than Haagen-Dazs ... we were here before Haagen-Dazs ... we have more stores so they have more of a chance to see our product, and our prices are better," said Jim Goddard, owner and manager of a Van Nuys branch of Baskin-Robbins.

Seventy people said Cuzzo Restaurant has the best salad bar. "They have just everything," said Claire Price. You can make a different kind of salad every time you go in.

For the \$5 all-you-can-eat plate, diners may select from 50 items, including seafood salad, nachos, potato skins with sour cream and chives, sprouts, ham, cheese, mushrooms, melon, apples and pasta salad. Diners also liked Encino's Adam's Restaurant (22) and the Odyssey Granada Hills (8).

The Palomino, with 79 votes, was clearly the winner for best country club, though owner Bill Thomas notes that it also hires jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock musicians. "Nobody can come here and feel comfortable. It's not a place where you just have young kids," he said.

Fifty-one voters chose the Sherman Oaks Galleria as best place to watch people. "The weekends are great. We are in a high-income area, so we get a lot of fashionable dressers and fun hairdos. On occasion, you'll see celebrities," said marketing director Elizabeth ... Others chose the Northridge Fashion Center (12).

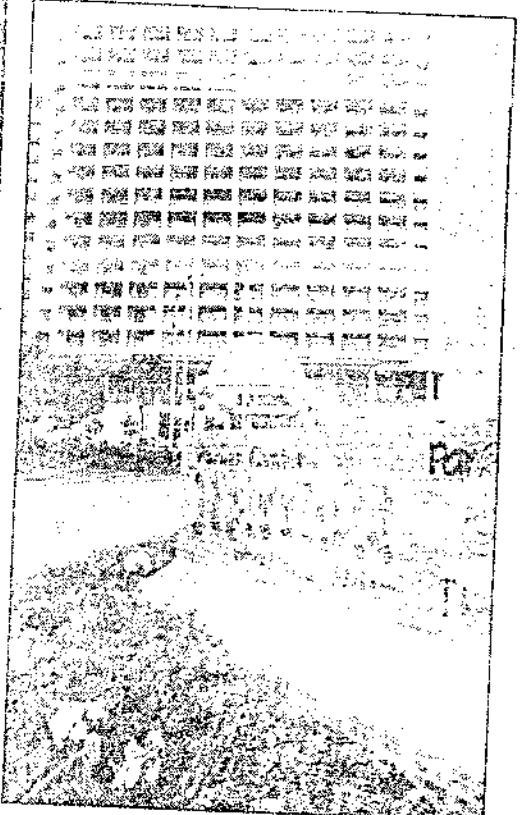


Balboa Park was voted the best all-around park, best place to jog and best spot for tennis.



Garry Watson/Daily News

Phil Pfister, left, and Brian Wolff taste-test In-N-Out Burger's winning fare.



Emmett Jordan/Daily News

The Warner Center Marriott was named best hotel and has best hotel bar.

Ventura Boulevard (11), Topanga Plaza (10), Balboa Park (7) and the Van Nuys Swap Meet (6).

The Galleria, with 40 votes, took second place to the Northridge Fashion Center (44) as best mall.

The top family attraction was Universal Studios (46), and readers also voted for Disneyland (15) and Magic Mountain (11) — some non-Valley attractions.

The Warner Center Marriott was named best hotel by 42 readers, and 26 picked the Marriott bar, Tickets, as best hotel bar. Sheraton Premiere (24) and Sheraton

Universal Hotel — North Hollywood (23) were also favored, and readers liked hotel bars at the Valley Hilton (15) and Sheraton Premiere (13).

Best bookstores were Crown Books (55), B. Dalton's (48) and WaldenBooks (13).

The Warehouse won out as best video rental store (49) and best record store (41). Record buyers liked Tower Records (34) more than Music Plus (23), but video renters liked Music Plus (13) more than Tower Video (8).

SUNDAY

BEST OF THE VALLEY

Readers' favorite places to shop, eat, play, learn, smooch and more

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Readers prefer ice cream from Baskin-Robbins 31 Ice Cream stores like this one in Van Nuys. Jeff Goldwater/Daily News

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The best pizza, said 39 voters, is at Numero Uno, Pizza Hut, Domino's and Mike's Pizza in Granada Hills each got eight votes.

El Torito (28) serves the best Mexican food, and Sierra's Mexican Restaurant (14) and Los Arcos (12) are also good.

But the Valley has more than shops and restaurants. Claire Price, 61, of Northridge said she moved to the Valley from West Los Angeles because it's more like the country. "I love the wide streets. I love the open feeling and friendly people. They are laid back and non-judgmental. They are willing to be and let be," she said.

Mulholland Drive, with its spectacular view of the Valley, was named best lover's lane (72 votes) and most scenic spot (39 votes). Others said lovers go to the top of Topanga Canyon (10), Odyssey restaurant's parking lot (4), Van Nuys Boulevard (3) and Winnetka Drive in (2).

Scenic spots included Odyssey (14), the top of Topanga (9), the Castaway in Burbank (6), Griffith Park (5), Pierce College (4) and Chatsworth Park (4).

Readers chose Balboa Park in Encino as the best all-around park (46 votes), best place to jog (60 votes) and best spot for tennis (41 votes). Balboa, which is part of Sepulveda Dam Basin, offers a one-mile roller-skating path, a six-mile bicycling path, tennis courts, outdoor volleyball courts, baseball diamonds, soccer fields and grassy spots for picnics. Other favorite parks included Chatsworth Park (19) and Griffith Park (10).

Inconclusive results

But on many questions, the numbers seemed inconclusive. It appears there was so much to choose from, everyone picked a different spot. For example, the 65 people who made an entry under best Chinese restaurant selected 31 different places. The best place — Fung Lum Restaurant in Universal City — got just nine votes.

Bea's Bakery in Tarzana (23) and Weby's Bakery in Studio City (20) got votes for best bakery.

The Country Club in Reseda and FM Station in North Hollywood each got 17 votes for best rock club.

Solley's in Northridge (27) and Art's in Studio City (25) are the best delis.

Best singles bar is Stanley's in Sherman Oaks (16), and the Red Onion in Woodland Hills came in second, with 11 votes.

Best dance club was Saschi's in Studio City (18), and again the Red Onion came in second, with 16.

Best brunches are offered at the Odyssey (13), L.G.T. Vegas (9) and El Torito (8).

Prizes awarded

Those who submitted ballots for the Best of the Valley contest were automatically eligible to win 16 prizes chosen by a random drawing. The top winner is Pamela Thayer of Canoga Park, who got \$100. Winners of Daily News gym bags are: Kate Freedo of Canoga Park, Donna Fowler of Van Nuys, Beth Fox of North Hollywood, Denay Freeburn of Northridge, Dee Hand of Pacoima, Wendy Strellner Halchor of Van Nuys, Jackie Huffaker of Arleta, Pat Kent of Reseda, Sandra Mack of Canoga Park, Tim McCurdy of Montrose, Sandra Metcalf-Moore of Granada Hills, Gregory Oinstead of Canoga Park, Marie Ramos of Van Nuys, Kenneth Steinhorn of Reseda and David Vebfon of Woodland Hills.

Teru Sushi (16) and Something's Fishy (15) offer the best sushi.

Best bowling is at Woodlake Bowl (17), Canoga Park Bowl (10), the Sports Center Bowl (8) and the Encino Bowl (8).

Best pools are at Northridge Park (12), Reseda Park (11) and the Van Nuys YMCA (11).

Readers voted for Holiday Spa (27), Sports Connection-Encino (23) and Racquetball World (13) for best health club.

Be true to your school

The best high schools are Grant (14), Taft (12), North Hollywood (11), Birmingham (10) and El Camino (10).

The best junior high schools are Portola (9), Sutter (8) and Hale (7).

The best elementary schools are Van Gogh (5) and Colfax (4).

Voters picked the U.A. Warner Center in Woodland Hills (21) and Valley West Man's Theatre in Tarzana (18) as best movie theaters.

The Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys and the Universal Amphitheatre each got 11 votes for best theater.

Claire Price made a note at the bottom of her survey: "Plus, we have many fine hospitals, doctors, physical therapists, dentists, community services, churches and synagogues."

Now that you know what's great about the Valley, remember it's not quite perfect. For example, Denise Halsten would like to change the weather.

"I'd like it if it would snow — not all the time, but just once so everyone could experience it."

Docudrama subjects risk