

ENTERTAINMENT

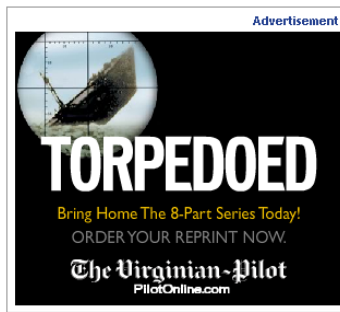
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Counting down the Top 10 of 2009

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The recession left its mark on the local entertainment scene in 2009 as restaurants struggled - some unsuccessfully - to remain open. Others retooled their menu offerings and a few opened their doors for lunch in hopes of snagging tight dining dollars.



Those closing their doors included Paul's on the South River, the venerable restaurant in Riva that had been serving diners since the end of World War II. And the Phillips Seafood empire shut down its cater-to-the-tourist City Dock facility, which a highly respected Washington, D.C., chef reopened last summer as an upscale seafood restaurant that now is drawing more locals downtown.

It wasn't all doom and gloom on the restaurant scene, however. More than 100 new establishments of one kind or another - ranging from pizza parlors to full-scale restaurants - opened countywide. The

ever-expanding Annapolis Towne Centre led the way with five restaurants opening at the Parole site.

Those openings followed a sizzling 2008 for greater Annapolis, with two restaurants opening at the Towne Centre and four more at the nearby Westfield Annapolis mall.

Now local diners have more restaurants options than ever before.

Meanwhile, some well-established restaurants marked anniversary years, with O'Leary's hitting 25 and Rams Head Tavern rounding out the year at 20. And its music venue in Baltimore, Rams Head Live, is still rockin' in its fifth year and remains the No. 1 club in Charm City.

The Annapolis Business Association launched its inaugural Restaurant Week last February, providing a spark to the industry at a time of the year when business is often soft. It will be back next year.

The Annapolis Seafood Festival staged a comeback this year, returning to Sandy Point State Park in September and luring thousands of seafood lovers from up and down the East Coast. Some months earlier, the park also was the site of the two-day Chesapeake Bay Blues Festival, which quickly sold out every one of the 250 available VIP packages.

Also last spring, the first business to move to the city's new arts and entertainment district opened.

Creative Paradox, a nonprofit arts center, moved into the 4,200-square-foot space on Spa Road in April, making it the first official tenant of the city's unique venture.

And last spring also saw a surge in outdoor concerts, giving area residents more opportunities to hear and enjoy local and regional musicians at a price all can afford during a recession - they were all free.

Meanwhile, the decade-long Bar Wars in Annapolis continued in 2009. This fall, the city Planning Commission has called for the creation of a panel to address issues that stand in the way of moving last call from midnight to 2 a.m.

Meanwhile, it did not make our Top 10 list, but McGarvey's, the revered City Dock restaurant and watering hole, made history - the saloon, for the first time since it opened in 1975, installed two TVs for patrons who want to catch major sporting events.

1. More restaurants open.

The Annapolis Towne Centre boosted its restaurant offerings this year when five establishments opened. The newcomers include Brio Tuscan Grille, The Chop House, Real Seafood Company, Ziki Japanese Steak House and the Metro Silver Diner. Whole Foods also opened at the Towne Centre, and one could argue it counts as the sixth new fine food service facility there. They join Gordon Biersch Brewery and P. F. Chang's China Bistro at the 33-acre site sandwiched between West Street and Forest Drive, Route 2 south and Riva Road.

Other restaurants opening in 2009 include Punk's Backyard Grill at Westfield mall, Eggcellence just across from the mall on Housley Road, Wild Country Seafood in Eastport, Katana Sushi and Japanese Restaurant on Truman Parkway, and the Blue Dolphin Seafood Bar and Grill and the Empire Gardens Restaurant, both in Gambrills.