

Springfield's Mane Event: A World Horseshoe Cook-Off Horse Race

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Springfield Restaurants Serve Veggie 'Shoes, Too - *Clarita*

Illinois restaurants waged comfort food war during 100th World Horseshoe Pitching Tourney in Springfield. When chefs compete, foodies everywhere win.

Restaurant chefs in Springfield, Illinois, started something big during a heated cooking contest that coincided with the [World Horseshoe Tournament's](#) 100th anniversary. The official 'shoe pitching and 'shoe cooking events took place in 2009 at the [Prairie Capital Convention Center](#). The National Horseshoe Pitchers Association ([NHPA](#)) chose Springfield, Illinois, that year to host its centennial tournament. The popular annual tourney takes place in a different city each year and draws veteran pitchers from around the world.

Iron Horseshoes vs. Iron Chefs

Traditional horseshoe pitchers from around the world battled for "ringers," trophies, cash prizes and scholarships. Meanwhile, Springfield restaurant chefs battled to win, place or show-off the city's best "horseshoe" - Springfield's unique, legendary and indulgent open-faced sandwich.

Springfield, IL, Restaurants Serve Winners and Also-Rans

Springfield residents have been sampling, savoring and debating about horseshoes since the late 1920s. They discuss its origin, ingredients, presentation and more. They argue about whether this occasionally mile-high "sandwich" is comfort food, junk food, a tribute to culinary creativity or a monument to dietary excess.

Ultimately, it's in the hands of the chef or the eye of the beholder. Variations run the culinary gamut from gourmet to garish. And while bystanders argue, a true foodie will pick up a napkin, knife and fork to sample their next "good-enough," great, brand-new or tried-and-true horseshoe.

Springfield's Search for the Best 'Shoe Goes Beyond Cook-Offs

Finding the best place to eat a 'shoe in Springfield, Illinois, requires discernment. A few Springfield restaurants have a reputation for consistently delivering a really good 'shoe. Others turn out quick-and-easy versions from canned, boxed or processed cheeses and frozen fries, appreciated by hungry patrons nonetheless. But the best horseshoes are a labor of love.

Springfield's 'shoe-searing front-runners start with a just-right roux, fresh potatoes cooked to perfection, aged white Cheddar or other cheeses, a few special seasonings, secret ingredients and sauce recipes that are often jealously guarded. The taste, texture and presentation of the sauce is very important. The right sauce is freshly prepared and blends with the ingredients without being too thin, too thick or overpowering. Like 'shoe's typical tower of heavy ingredients, it's a balancing act.

Horseshoe sizes run the gamut, too, from build-your-own potentially petite [ponyshoe bars](#) to the health-flaunting "[Triple-Bypass](#)" 'shoe for diners destined to be on a first-name basis with their cardiologist.

Read on

- [Springfield's Best Breakfast Horseshoes: D&J Café](#)
- [Springfield's Best Breakfast Horseshoes: Charlie Parker's](#)
- [Springfield's Habit-Forming Horseshoe Sandwich, Warning Sign 5](#)

‘Shoe Strategies Devised by Springfield, Illinois Restaurant Regulars

Springfield diners may have elaborate strategies for rationalizing or ameliorating the sandwiches’ calorically challenging impact. This may involve budgeting calories in the weeks prior to indulging; splitting a sandwich with friends; exercising religiously during the days before or after the big event; or throwing caution to the wind in celebration of a special day or “just because.”

Plan B may involve a doggie bag for those who can’t or don’t want to finish it all in one sitting.

The Real Horse(shoe) Race Didn’t Start at the 2009 World Cook-off, but it Escalated There

Springfield’s World Horseshoe Cook-off was not the starting gate for such competition, but it did stir the ongoing race for a bigger or better horseshoe. Nine leading Springfield restaurant chefs accepted the challenge and gathered to cook up the perfect ‘shoe.

The event and the controversy among participants hit a few snags before it was all said and done. The experience only heated up the restaurant rivalry. Chefs and foodies only geared up for the next event, the next poll, or the next informal bragging rights among Springfield diners addicted to horseshoes and horseshoe history.

In the World Cook-off contest and other events around town, Springfield chefs are always on the fast-track toward developing a horseshoe that’s bigger, better or both. And when horseshoe chefs compete, Springfield horseshoe-racing fans consider it a food, fun and flavor trifecta.

Springfield ‘Shoe Contest Rules

The World Cook-off officials specified that only restaurants were eligible to compete. The event was not open to unaffiliated ‘shoe chefs. Official rules also specified that the sauce and meat could be prepared in advance, but preparation and assembly of the other ingredients – such as the bread and potatoes – were to take place on-site at the Prairie Capital Convention Center.

A False Start and a Photo Finish

In an unfortunate case of crossed wires, officials inadvertently gave one restaurant a slight competitive edge – not a small thing for competitive rivals headed down the homestretch in a dead heat. Officials had surveyed available cooking space and permitted [Lindsay’s Restaurant](#) to use their own nearby kitchen facilities. Lindsay’s is located in the adjacent [President Abraham Lincoln Hotel](#), which was connected to the site by an underground walkway.

When the other contestants learned about the rules-breach after the fact, it set off some hoof-stomping arguments. Lindsay’s winning breakfast shoe and “crazy shoe” entries were sidelined. After careful consideration, judges allowed the restaurant to keep the “best overall” horseshoe award. The convention center took responsibility for the misstep. But the controversy only fueled future culinary rivalries to the delight of ‘shoe fans everywhere.

The Winners ... by a Nose

The taste, presentation and a number of other factors, including the aroma of freshly prepared and ready-to-sample food fare, made the ultimate toteboard tally challenging for entrants, judges and rookie samplers alike. Portions were set out for bystanders to weigh in, but contest officials made the final choices and media and others snapped photos for the record ... and bragging rights.

After a close race and a literal photo finish, here are the results:

- **Classic Shoe:** D’Arcy’s Pint
- **Breakfast Shoe:** The Pasfield House
- **Crazy Horse Shoe:** D’Arcy’s Pint
- **Dessert Shoe:** Amber Jack Alehouse
- **Best Overall Shoe:** Lindsay’s

Contests like this cook-off and others are part of a Springfield culinary tradition that started small and keeps getting bigger. After all these years, Springfield restaurant chefs are still happy to throw down the calorically challenged culinary gauntlet.

Learn more about Springfield, Illinois Attractions:

[Hungry Enough to Eat a Horseshoe? An Illinois Road Food Attraction](#)

[Springfield, Illinois' Many Horseshoe Varieties - A Closer Look at What's on the Menu](#)

[Route 66 Road Trip - the Original Cozy Dog, Springfield, Illinois](#)

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