

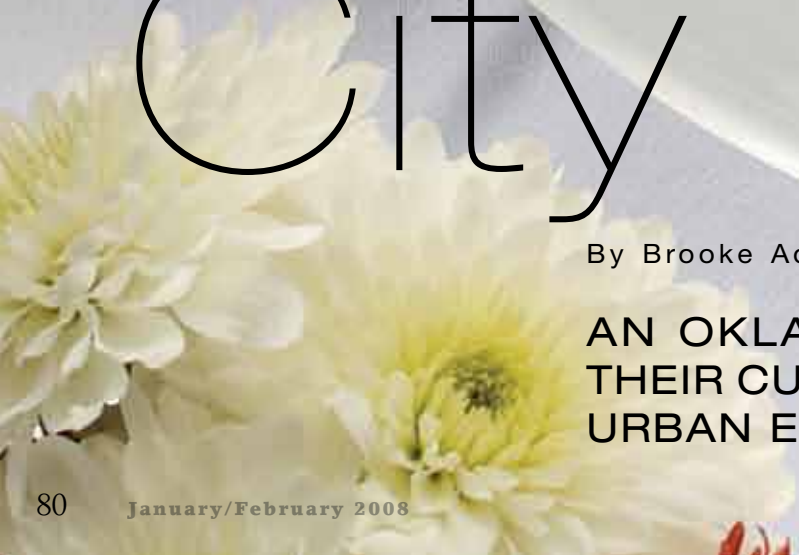
**BRAIN FOOD**  
Inventive menus, creative dining atmospheres, and excellent service have made A Good Egg Dining Group restaurants Oklahoma City landmarks. The Mixed Seafood Tamales at Cheever's Cafe are a signature dish.



# City Comforts

By Brooke Adcox | Photography by John Jernigan

**AN OKLAHOMA CITY COUPLE PUTS THEIR CULINARY STAMP ON A TRIO OF URBAN EATERIES.**



THE HUMAN PALATE is instinctively attracted to some of cooking's most famous pairings—salt and pepper, bread and butter, wine and cheese—combinations that strike a balance between the familiar and the extraordinary.

It's a concept Oklahoma City restaurateurs Keith and Heather Paul have developed into a signature style: infusing regional comfort foods with modern flavors to create an experience entirely unique to the state's culinary arts scene.

The husband-and-wife team's trio of restaurants—Cheever's Cafe, Iron Starr Urban Bar-B-Q, and Red Prime Steak—form A Good Egg Dining Group, an operation that started with a hidden gem of a neighborhood bistro and has grown to include one of the most cutting-edge dining concepts in Oklahoma City.

It's a company that began with, Heather says, "credit cards and prayer," plus the belief that one self-taught chef with a love of butter, cream, salt, and chilis and one round-the-clock manager with a penchant for picking perfectly scouted restaurant locations would ultimately find their own recipe for success.



Located on the corner of Northwest Twenty-third and Hudson in Oklahoma City, Cheever's Cafe has been a local dining favorite since 2000.

"When we told people we were going to open Cheever's, they thought we were crazy," says Heather.

The young couple, both sales reps for the Oklahoma City branch of Ben E. Keith Foods, had only credit cards and family loans at their disposal in 2000 when they decided to take over Cheever's Cafe from Charlene Humphreys, a client in Keith's sales district. Even with its proximity to the affluent Mesta Park and Heritage Hills neighborhoods, Cheever's location on the corner of Twenty-third Street and Hudson wasn't exactly a dining hot spot like the restaurant rows on Northwest Expressway and Meridian Avenue.

"I came home that night, we threw around the idea, and two weeks later, we were getting in the restaurant business," says Keith. "Needless to say, we've come a long way."

Heather quickly quit her nine-to-five job to manage the restaurant during the day and night shifts, while Keith, still working at Ben E. Keith, developed recipes into the wee hours of the morning. His mission: to create contemporary comfort foods that not only give class and sophistication to old favorites but also provide a unique culinary experience not yet introduced into the Oklahoma City restaurant scene.

"We had the idea that we wanted to do regional cuisine, our twist on southwest comfort favorites," says Heather. "We wanted to keep a neighborhood bistro feel and showcase the foods we love."

Now an established Oklahoma City favorite, Cheever's boasts a steady lunch crowd, providing the perfect meeting ground for time-crunched suits conducting business while noshing on everything from a BLT to a grilled yellowfin tuna with cilantro pesto and *citrus beurre blanc*.

The restaurant seats up to eighty-five and displays its wine and beer selections in the refrigerated flower cases used when the building operated as Cheever's flower shop from the 1930s to 1990s.

"Cheever's is my favorite place for a lunch meeting," says Meg Salyer, president of Accel



An extensive wine list and full bar complement the gourmet menu at Red Prime Steak.

### In Good Spirits

IAN CLARKE, RED PRIME STEAK'S DIRECTOR OF WINE AND SPIRITS, UNCORKS TIPS FOR SELECTING THE PERFECT BOTTLE FROM HIS HAND-SELECTED LIST OF 300 WINES.

**BREAK THE RULES.** "The old adage of red wine with red meat and white wine with chicken and fish doesn't really apply anymore," says Clarke, who suggests focusing more on acidity and body when choosing a wine.

**FIND YOUR NICHE.** Take advantage of a comprehensive wine list by using the opportunity to taste vintages from lesser-known producers. Clarke recommends Blackbird Proprietary Red, Four Graces Reserve Pinot, and Sineann Chardonnay.

**NAME YOUR PRICE.** Don't be afraid of a limited budget. "A lot of people judge wine based on price, but there are quality wines at every price point," Clarke says.

**QUESTION ON.** Seek advice from experts like Clarke when investing in a bottle of wine. "It is often difficult to please an entire table," says Clarke, "but it's so much fun."

**BE LIKE MINDED.** "The most important thing when picking out a wine is to get what you like," says Clarke, who adds that Red also offers a fully stocked bar and vintage-inspired cocktail menu to satisfy thirsts of all kinds.



With dishes like Five Spice Tilapia and Molasses Roast Chicken Breast, Cheever's Cafe delights palates with a sophisticated take on home-style classics.

'I came home that night, we threw around the idea, and two weeks later, we were getting in the restaurant business.'



## A Taste of Home

EXECUTIVE CHEF ROBERT BLACK DISHES ON USING OKLAHOMA INGREDIENTS.

"The closer to home, the fresher the food," says **ROBERT BLACK**, the detail-oriented and business-minded executive chef for A Good Egg Dining Group. Black shops at Earthbound Farms in Oklahoma City for micro greens and

heirloom tomatoes for dishes like Red Prime Steak's RP Tomato Salad and taps Seaboard Foods with its Guymon connections for the Prime Pork Porterhouse also featured at Red. The chef orders honey and venison from

Guthrie's Honey Hill Farm and routinely visits Super Cao Nguyen supermarket in Oklahoma City for miso, bean sprouts, bok choy, and fresh fish when developing Asian-inspired menu specials.

Financial Staffing Solutions in Oklahoma City. "I've been a customer from day one, and there isn't anything on the menu I haven't tried."

In the evening, Cheever's Cafe has a distinctly adult setting of young couples clasping hands across the table and good friends catching up over a bottle of Cabernet.

But no matter how great the company or how seasoned the guest, the conversation ultimately shifts to oohs and aahs when waiters bring out boldly presented main dishes like the tilapia with tequila-lime butter and chicken-fried steak served with jalapeño cream gravy and garlic red-skinned mashed potatoes.

"Cheever's is still the showcase restaurant for our favorite types of cuisine: Southwest, soul, and comfort food," says Heather. "The chefs and cooks get the opportunity to bring in unique ingredients and try them out on the guests. Cheever's provides the most custom and personal experience of the three restaurants."

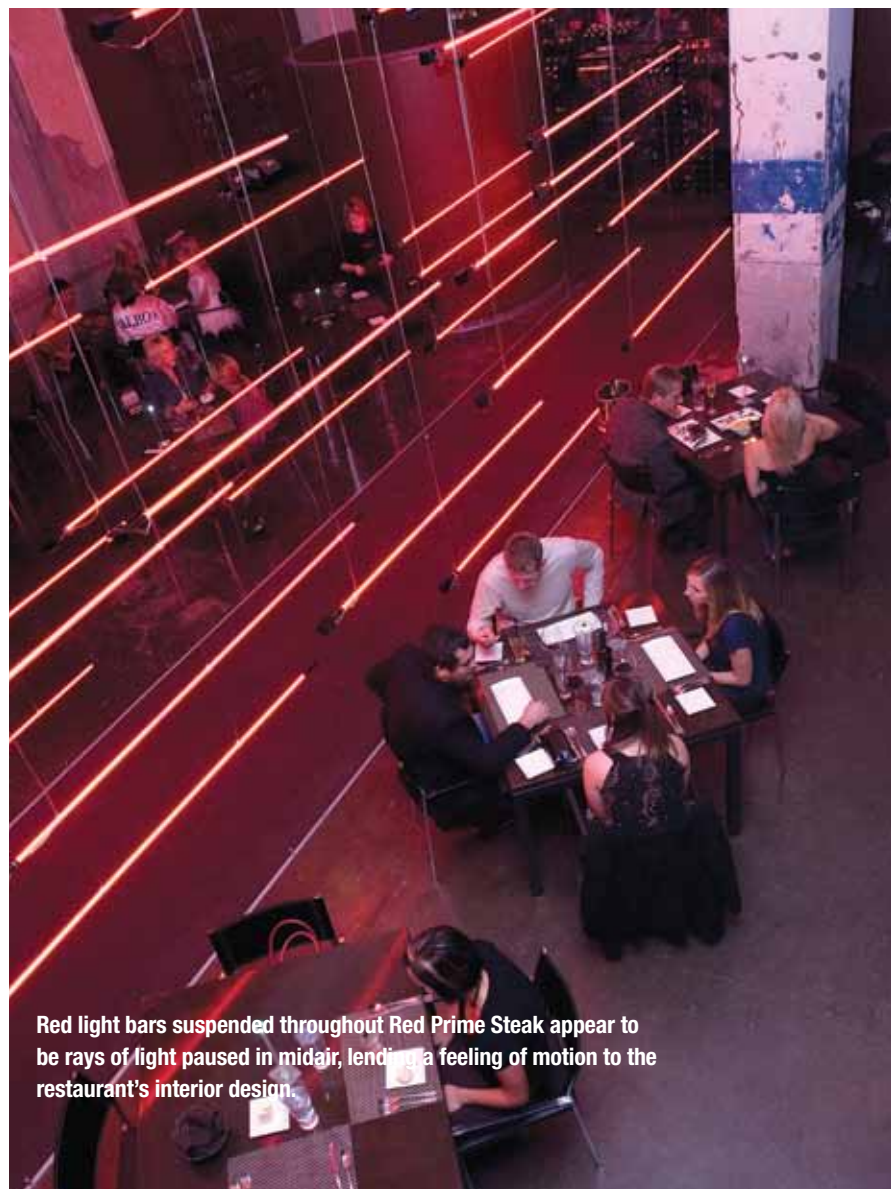
**A**S POPULARITY FOR Cheever's Cafe has heated up, the Pauls added more spice to their culinary repertoire in 2002 with a second restaurant, Iron Starr Urban Bar-B-Q. Located at Thirty-sixth and Shartel in Oklahoma City's Crown Heights neighborhood, the restaurant elevates regional blue-plate barbecue to family-friendly fine dining.

"When we had the opportunity to do Iron Starr, we felt really patriotic," says Heather, who speaks of the time spent developing the menu shortly after September 11, 2001. "Barbecue is one of the only indigenous foods to America. We wanted to put our stamp on the all-American meal."

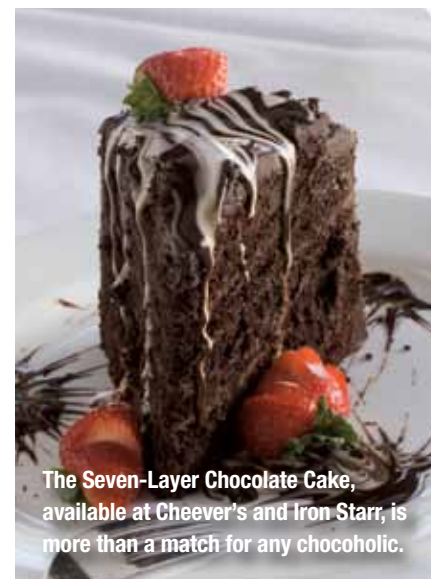
Building on the wide demographic appeal of barbecue, Iron Starr, with seating for two hundred, accommodates a large audience. The generous portions start with finger-licking

appetizers like prairie fries, hand-cut French fries topped with chili, cheese, jalapeños, and sweet onions. Main courses include smokehouse staples like fall-off-the-bone St. Louis-style ribs, sliced brisket, pulled pork, and smoked turkey plus more cosmopolitan fare including quail, glazed salmon, and assorted salad entrées.

But the most frequent discussions heard over the hustle and bustle of the happening restaurant are groups debating what side dishes should accompany their meals. Iron Starr boasts twelve options ranging from crunchy stalks of fried okra to the popular fancy mac and cheese made with earthy Gruyère.



Red light bars suspended throughout Red Prime Steak appear to be rays of light paused in midair, lending a feeling of motion to the restaurant's interior design.



The Seven-Layer Chocolate Cake, available at Cheever's and Iron Starr, is more than a match for any chocoholic.



Keith and Heather Paul own the three A Good Egg Dining Group restaurants.

"I grew up with mac and cheese considered a vegetable," Keith says.

Iron Starr guests also should plan to order their cake and eat it, too. The eatery's signature chocolate cake, which originated and still is on the menu at Cheever's, features seven velvety chocolate layers divvied out in a portion large enough to satisfy the sweet tooth of more than one patron at the table.

If the night's agenda includes munching on hickory-smoked chicken while catching up on episodes of *Grey's Anatomy*, Iron Starr can also accommodate takeout orders of virtually any size. In fact, on Wednesday's rib night special, general manager Kimberly Henderson estimates that more than half the day's sales are from to-go orders.

"We have a lot of comfort food," says Henderson, a confessed mac and cheese addict. "I think that's what's special about our to-go service. People like to take home good food after a long day's work."

**T**HE PAULS' NEWEST endeavor has the Oklahoma culinary community looking through rose colored glasses and seeing Red.

Red Prime Steak provides a decidedly different experience from Oklahoma City's cattle call of traditional steak houses, featuring a selection of epicurean delicacies that rival menus from any of New York or L.A.'s trendiest restaurants. Open since August 2007, Red Prime Steak embodies both progressive cool and down-home Oklahoma cooking through its concept of red meat, red wine, and red dirt.

Housed in the historic Buick Building on Broadway in downtown Oklahoma City's Automobile Alley district, the 7,500-square-foot restaurant sports a bold urban design by Oklahoma City's award-winning architect Rand Elliott. Elliott owns the Buick Building with his wife Jeanette, who helmed Red Prime's marketing, website, and branding.

The restaurant takes full advantage of its eighteen-foot ceilings, dramatic floating wine

wall, private dining pods, and red neon lights that illuminate the space in its signature hue and create a unique ambiance.

"We felt that food was king at Red, and the experience begins with a very dramatic process of walking through the restaurant with your focus on the food and the kitchen," says Rand Elliott, who frequently dines on the Buffalo Sloppy Joes.

It's no secret that even though Red Prime offers popular entrées like southern fried chicken and broiled lobster tail, the main stars of the menu include its selection of prime, Kobe, and forty-day dry-aged beefsteaks. Guests should prepare to make some tough decisions; each steak comes with the



## Fine Food, Will Travel

CHEEVER'S CATERING PROVIDES MORE THAN YOUR AVERAGE MINI-QUICHE.

CHEEVER'S CATERING AND EVENTS started on a shoestring budget after Keith and Heather Paul decided taking their food on the road was the best way to advertise the restaurant. Now a full-fledged operation with several events per week, Cheever's routinely caters weddings, private parties, and events with good eats like Oklahoma "Caviar" and Pepita and Chile Crusted Baby Lollipop Lamb Chops. "The food you get is restaurant quality," says Heather Paul. "You can expect the same experience as Cheever's at your event, even if it is eight hundred people."

'Barbecue is one of the only indigenous foods to America. We wanted to put our stamp on the all-American meal.'



In need of comfort? The food at Iron Starr Urban Bar-B-Q provides plenty of it. Southern staples like ribs, okra, and collard greens will kick up endorphin levels a notch or two.

Red embodies progressive cool and down-home cooking through its red meat, red wine, and red dirt concept.



### Reservations, Please

A GUIDE TO GETTING TO A GOOD EGG DINING GROUP'S RESTAURANTS

**Cheever's Cafe**  
2409 North Hudson Avenue  
(405) 525-7007 or [cheeverscafe.com](http://cheeverscafe.com)

**Iron Starr Urban Bar-B-Q**  
3700 North Shartel  
(405) 524-5925 or [ironstarrbbq.com](http://ironstarrbbq.com)

**Red Prime Steak**  
504 North Broadway  
(405) 232-2626 or [redprimesteak.com](http://redprimesteak.com)

Online reservations for all three restaurants are available at [opentable.com](http://opentable.com).



Red Prime Steak's hip downtown location and high-end cuisine are a draw for those in search of style with substance.

opportunity to choose one of six seasoning crusts—ranging from brown sugar and sea salt to a chili rub—and select one of six sauces from a list that includes homemade Worcestershire, brandy mushroom, and black truffle butter.

But the choices don't stop there. Red features an accessories menu with fourteen side items, all reinvented steak house essentials like Horseradish Potato Gratin, Slivered Asparagus Covered in Asiago Cheese, and Sautéed Wild Mushrooms.

"Picking your cut, rub, sauce, and sides promotes sharing. It is something you might not see at a steak house but at a tapas bar," says Heather.

THE ADDITION OF Red marks a sea change for the Pauls, who brought in investors, oversaw a large construction project, and hired an executive chef to assist Keith in creating and overseeing menus.

Chef Robert Black, former executive chef of the Oklahoma City Museum of Art Café, quickly has become the quintessential third ingredient to Keith and Heather's mirepoix, providing administrative and creative support for the growing restaurant group.

"Keith and Heather are the think tanks behind our company," says Black, who has been with A Good Egg since August 2006. "They come up with our concepts, and my

role is to find a way to make it work."

Keith and Heather Paul downplay the fact that they are among Oklahoma City's hottest restaurant entrepreneurs. To escape the hectic pace of the restaurant biz, the couple can be found working on their Heritage Hills home or spending time with their two dogs.

But for now, the Gen-X pair says they aren't finished growing, citing the rejuvenation of Oklahoma City's downtown as inspiration to develop more concepts into area restaurants.

Says Keith, "Right now it's time to ride the momentum of Oklahoma City and have a good time with it."

