

Source: <http://www2.rmcil.edu/eagle/Archives/August2007/news02.htm>

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THE **EAGLE** "...news from a bird's eye view" | ROBERT MORRIS COLLEGE

Hot dog days of summer: Find the best dogs in Chicago and the suburbs

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A delicious Portillo's hot dog is just the cure for the summer munchies.

Lauren Haselberger/ the Eagle
Photographed

Some like them plain, some topped with ketchup only. Some connoisseurs like the messiness of chili and cheese; some like unique toppings like teriyaki sauce and pineapple. The true Chicago Dog loyalists love them topped with yellow mustard, bright green relish, fresh chopped onions, two tomato wedges, a pickle spear, sport peppers, and celery salt. It is one of our favorite foods, served everywhere from ballparks, backyard grills, and street vendors. It is the hot dog; a portable

masterpiece of secret ingredients (hopefully one being meat) that consistently brings about love and memories.

According to the website HotDogChicagoStyle.com, a hot dog may be defined as a frankfurter served in a soft bun or a type of cooked meat shaped like a sausage.

The website also claims that hot dogs have a rich history dating back to the days of Homer and The Odyssey. While the first hot dog stand opened in 1867 in Brooklyn, NY and served Coney Island dogs, the Vienna Beef company of Chicago claims that the particular "Chicago Style" Dog was invented in 1893 at the Columbian Exposition.

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In a city of over 500 hot dogs vendors, it is hard to determine where to find to the best hot dog. If looking for variety, a popular choice is Hot Doug's Sausage Superstore and Encased Meats Emporium, off of North California in Chicago.

Along with a Chicago Dog, the menu serves masters of creativity like The Keira Knightley (a fire-hot dog), the Marty Allen (a beef and pork dog with garlic), and the Pete Shelley (a vegetarian hot dog). Each week Hot Doug's features a Game of the Week Dog (this week's is Cheddar and Bacon Elk Sausage with Draught Mustard and Sage) as well as hot dog specials like Sonoran-Style Jalapeno-Cheddar Jumbo Hot Dog wrapped in Bacon with Jalapeno Mayonnaise, Pinto Beans, Onions and Tomatoes or Spicy Jerk Pork Sausage with Tropical Mayonnaise and Sauteed Plantains. Information on Hot Doug's can be found online at www.hotdoughs.com or by calling 773-279-9550.

The Superdawg Drive-In, located off Milwaukee Avenue in Chicago, was voted Best Hot Dog in 2005 for their spectacular beef dogs. According to Citisearch.com, the prized item is the Superdawg, topped with traditional Chicago toppings. City resident Matt Kudla said, "The hot dogs are big, savory, and have the perfect firm texture. In fact they are almost sweet. They arrive with crinkle-cut fries in a bright red and blue box. I go out of my way for these dogs." Prices are cheap (although they only accept cash), and the drive-in dining allows people to eat in their cars or outdoors. To find out more call 773-763-0660.

On the South Side of the suburbs, at Pulaski and 114th, is a mom-and-pop hot dog shop with a reputation for great dogs and draft root beer. Frosted Mug Drive-In in Alsip is Chicago's last drive-in with car hops. Shawn Major, a frequent diner, said, "I go there about once a week for their spectacular hot dogs and a frosted mug of root beer. It reminds me of Saturdays with my dad when I was a kid. We used to get hot dogs and root beer, and then do the yard work that we promised my mother would get done last weekend. The dogs are perfect and firm in a steaming hot bun; and the root beer is cold and refreshing. I love it."

For more information about their food or upcoming car show events, check out the website at www.thefrostedmug.com.

At the DuPage campus, it is a common sight to see student Vicki Parks arriving late for class with a bag featuring the Portillo's logo, while the other students and teachers are salivating for a taste of the Chicago icon's fare. With 31 locations in Chicagoland, Indiana, and California, Portillo's serves classic beef hot dogs and polish sausages, as well as sandwiches, salads, and desserts. Geneva resident Jessica Plocinski said, "I love going to Portillo's. I usually order the Beef Hot Dog topped with the typical Chicago-style fixings. It is just how a hot dog should taste."

And make sure to get a Chocolate Cake Shake. I hate chocolate and I still love the shake!" For the regular dog and fries, customers will pay less than \$5, and have a hot dog worth remembering. Menu information and locations can be found at www.portillos.com.

Teacher Ben Helton frequents the Orland Park hot dog location off of 143rd Street and Wolf Road. Pop's Italian Beef and Sausage is known for having great food at a cheap price. While the menu features broasted chicken and Italian Beef, his favorite item is the hot dog. He said, "The bun is perfectly steamed, the hot dogs are the perfect consistency, and all the hot dogs come with really tasty fries. In fact, their dogs are so good they only need a bit of ketchup. Everything else would destroy the integrity that is a hot dog." Contact Pops for these hot dogs by phone at 708-403-9070. City resident Elliot Mandel recently underwent a hot dog tragedy; "Right now I am without a favorite hot dog place. It was Big Herm's, on Washington at the River, but they closed a few months ago, much to my great sadness. Dogs were \$2.10, service and atmosphere were totally Chicago. Haven't been able to find a place that good since--and probably won't." Hot dog loyalties run deep, and if none of these suggestions sound appealing, then try preparing your own dogs at home. HotDogChicagoStyle.com features a detailed list of instructions as to how to prepare the perfect Chicago Style Dog. If not in the culinary preparation mood, then explore around for your perfect hot dog place. Garnish them with ketchup, chili and cheese, or with the specified list of Chicago Style toppings. Become a hot dog aficionado, and use the dog days of summer to find Chicago's best hot dog.