



### MEET THE CONTENDERS

Jacyara de Oliveira | *Sportsman's Club, Nico Osteria*

Antar Jackson | *Fairways*

Brian Sturgulewski | *Drumbar*

Carlos A. Matias III | *Punch House, Dusek's*

Amy Probasco | *Girl & The Goat*

Heather Zerr | *Meat*

Scott LoBianco | *The Berkshire Room*

Laura Sandborn | *Jellyfish*

**VOTE FOR YOUR FAVORITE  
BY FEBRUARY 10<sup>TH</sup> AT 5PM**  
[redeyechicago.com/bartender](http://redeyechicago.com/bartender)

Top 4 finalists compete to be named  
**RedEye's Best Bartender at**  
**THE FINAL SHAKEDOWN**  
Wed., February 26<sup>th</sup> at American Junkie

**TICKETS ONLY \$10!**



No Purchase Necessary. Contest starts February 5, 2014 with voting from February 5, 2014 to February 26, 2014. Open to all bartenders in a Chicago, IL establishment, 21+ as of start date from Cook, Lake, McHenry, Kane, DuPage or Will counties. Excludes Sponsor EEs and family members. 1st prize: \$500 cash; 3 2nd prizes: \$100 gift packs. Full rules at [www.redeyechicago.com/bartender](http://www.redeyechicago.com/bartender). Sponsor: RedEye.

#BestBartenderChl

## THE ESSENTIALS

UPPING YOUR CHICAGO RESTAURANT CRED ONE BITE AT A TIME

LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE FILE



By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

I have a habit of tweeting meat porn. Sometimes the centerpiece of my protein brags—a spicy, juicy currywurst sausage made from local pork, for example—comes from Noble Square's Butcher & Larder, owned by Rob and Allie Levitt. When I'm grilling up something else—say, a brontosaurus-sized tomahawk ribeye that I usually procure from another local butcher shop that doesn't get its meat from local farms—Rob will tweet me with a gentle ribbing about how it's been a while since I've visited his shop. It's a subtle, not preachy, reminder: Where your meat comes from and how it was raised matters.

A few years ago, if you wanted to cook with local meat, you pretty much had to stick to frozen, pre-butchered cuts from Green City Market and other farmers markets. If you really wanted fresh, local farm meat, dining out was your best option. One of the few restaurants you could always count on getting local meat was the Levitts' snout-to-tail Wicker Park restaurant Mado.

When Mado closed in 2010, the Levitts were kind of burnt out, and with a child on the way, were looking for a new way to make a living. Rob noticed that his friends at the Brooklyn butcher shop Meat Hook were pretty successful and he and Allie decided to start their own retail butcher shop.

As a restaurateur, Rob had access to the best locally farmed ingredients; at Butcher & Larder, he has succeeded in bringing them to home-cooking Chicagoans. If you need bones for stock, pig's feet for a bean dish or farm-fresh eggs, this is your place. Their meat comes from within a few hundred miles, from

### BUTCHER & LARDER

1026 N. Milwaukee Ave. 773-687-8280

**Looks like:** Pig tchotchkes, shiny knives and ruddy cuts of meat

**Sounds like:** Black Sabbath followed by Coltrane on the house sound system punctuated by the smartass, chop-busting friendly banter of the butchers

**Smells like:** Freshly butchered meat and the perfume of whatever beautiful so up is roasting in the slow cooker near the counter

small, sustainable farms that rarely sell to retail, such as Slagel Family Farms in Fairbury, Ill., or Gunthorp Farms in LaGrange, Ind.

Levitt and most of his other butchers worked in restaurant kitchens before they became butchers, which means they also make incredible prepared food and charcuterie. These items vary from week to week, so call ahead to see what's on offer. There's a mean chili verde (a garlicky pork sausage and green chili-filled stew that warmed my soul on a recent snowy Saturday; price ranges from \$3 for a cup to \$16 for a quart). The Italian beef with hot giardiniera (Sto for a sandwich, soda and chips) is one of the best in the city.

Maybe the most overplayed trope about the food business is how it's like a family. At Butcher & Larder, though, it's true: When you're a customer, if only for a few minutes, the Levitts and their staff bring you into that fold, too. And once they get your trust, they can get you to eat anything. As Levitt said, "We'll do braised pig's head on an apple fritter and we'll sell more of that than a ham and cheese sandwich."

MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR.