

What we loved in 2007



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With 2007 safely in the rear-view mirror, it's time to take the annual look back at what kind of year it was.

As is our tradition, we'll leave the bad and the ugly to other publications, focusing instead on what was good, fun, new and different in our burg in the past 12 months.

We don't rank our Top 50, because we can't even agree among ourselves as to whether this restaurant is better than that rock band, but this year we did select a Top 5 — the events and places that had everybody talking in '07. Take a look, then get ready to outdo yourselves yet again. Happy New Year!

OUR FAVE FIVE

THE HILL CENTER

Now, a shopping mall is not something we usually get excited about. As a general rule, they're ugly, they make traffic worse and they're not much fun to visit.

What we love about the Hill Center is that it's not so much a mall as a harbinger of better days ahead for development in Nashville. In this consumerist crystal ball, we glimpse the wave of the future: thoughtful landscaping, a walkable street plan, concealed parking garages in lieu of acres of surface lots. Heck, they even thought to put offices and stuff *above* the stores! And all this in Green Hills, which we all thought was condemned to strip-mall leprosy for eternity.

There's a lot of boutique action and a handful of restaurants, but really, it's all about the Whole Foods (see No. 46). That bastion of ethical eating has finally landed in our city, and we couldn't be happier about the local produce, the dessert buffet, the gelato bar, the preposterously well-equipped meat counter. Our only request: Can we have one downtown, too?

— WILL AYERS

NO SMOKING, PLEASE!

It's not that we're against smokers' rights. Smoking is an addiction, and people who smoke should have a safe, clean place to light up. But one thing smoking is not compatible with is eating. With smoking in businesses now banned, Nashville joins company with such world-class dining cities as New York and San Francisco. There are some odd wrinkles to the new Tennessee law, of course — smoking is still permitted on patios, which critics say forces a competitive disadvantage upon restaurants that don't have patios, or at least a roll-up garage door. Then there's the 21-plus exception, which allows smoking in establishments that deny access to patrons under 21. But overall, the smoking ban has worked well in its first couple of months.

— DANA KOPP FRANKLIN

NASHVILLE PREDATORS STAY IN NASHVILLE

What we fail to remember, when looking through the professional sports prism at the Nashville Predators, is that things are seldom as

good, or as bad, as they seem.

When the calendar flipped back in January, the Preds were the hottest team in the NHL, leading the league's overall standings and attracting a goodly amount of national attention (or at least as much attention as the NHL ever generates).

When the team traded for high-profile center Peter Forsberg in February, fans felt confident that this was the final piece of the Preds' puzzle.

A fairly quick first-round exit from the playoffs forestalled that idea. And then it seemed like the wheels really came off.

When a hockey club is making headlines in the summertime, it's rarely good news. But that was the case for the Predators as original owner Craig Leipold sought to get out. The cadre of local investors that now make up the team's ownership group has mollified some, but skeptics still remain, concerned about the long-term viability of pro hockey in Nashville.

And then there's the team itself, stripped of a lot of the offensive firepower of last year's squad, and struggling to regain footing in a hyper-competitive Central Division. They're currently at the bottom looking up, but when you really look at it, the situation is not as bad as it might seem.

Just like it wasn't as good as it seemed one year ago.

— LUCAS HENDRICKSON

FLUGTAG

Red Bull may give you wings, but that doesn't mean you can fly. The energy drink company hosted Nashville's first Flugtag ("flying day" in German), drawing nearly 80,000 fans to Riverfront Park on a *very* hot day in June. Twenty-nine teams from around the country spent nearly a year crafting human-powered flying machines to be judged on distance flown, as well as style and flair, showcased during each team's "pre-flight skit." One by one they lined up to launch themselves off a 30-foot-high tarmac in an effort to soar above the murky Cumberland River. Few flew. The biggest story of the day was the success of the "Rocky Top Rocket," a giant banjo with a wind glider attached to the top. Despite its comical appearance, the contraption soared 155 feet through the air, doubling the former North American record of 83 feet! The crowd went nuts, with thousands wildly waving scorecards. A perfect 10.

— HEATHER BYRD

NEXT BIG NASHVILLE GROWS UP AND OUT

The giddy excitement over Nashville rock and pop acts getting a shot at the national scene isn't quite at the high it was a few years ago, so this year's super-sized Next Big Nashville festival — which saw more than 100 local non-country acts play at clubs all over town for four nights — was less about finding the "next big thing" and more about appreciating all the musical talent this town has to offer — even if we end up keeping some of it to ourselves. And appreciate it we did: Fans and fellow musicians turned out in droves throughout the weekend, cheering on their friends and peers and displaying the kind of solidarity most music scenes can only dream of.

— DAVE PAULSON

THE REST OF THE BEST 6. THE WHITE STRIPES SLAY US AT CANNERY BALLROOM

At the conclusion of this last-minute gig — the first White Stripes concert in nearly two years — frontman and Nashville resident Jack White thanked his "new hometown" for attending on such short notice. No apologies were necessary, though. As tickets had sold out in just minutes the day before, it's clear that Nashville would welcome Jack and Meg to town any time. —D.P.

7. KANYE ROCKS VANDY'S HOMECOMING

This was likely the biggest year yet for rapper/producer Kanye West, and Nashville got to see him kick off his world tour as the storm of praise, hype and hate surrounding him and his *Graduation* album were at their peak. — **D.P.**

8. BONNAROO'S FESTIVE FESTIVAL SCENE

This year's installment of the now-world-famous music festival was blessed with superstar headliners (The Police), fewer unfortunate incidents than in previous years and plenty of Nashville acts captivating crowds, from the tents (American Bang, The Dynamites) to the main stages (Kings of Leon, The White Stripes). — **D.P.**

9. IT'S DYLAN. AT THE RYMAN. WHAT MORE DO YOU NEED?

Though Bob Dylan's concerts are notoriously hit-or-miss, he put on a pair of exceptional shows at the Mother Church for those lucky enough to score a seat, appearing surprisingly energetic and emotional and bringing along surprise guests Elvis Costello and Jack White. — **D.P.**

10. RENOVATIONS AT THE AIRPORT

Flying in and out of Nashville is getting a lot easier on the eyes, thanks to major overhauls of terminals and retail at Nashville International. It's getting tastier, too: Local favorite Baja Burrito set up shop this summer, and Provence, Swett's and Tootsie's will follow in early '08. Goodbye, plastic-wrapped sandwiches! — **W.A.**

11. URBAN DEVELOPMENT ROLLS ALONG

About this time last year, we did a story trying to poke holes in the booming condo market. Would all these proposed projects *really* get built, we wondered, and would there be enough interested tenants to fill them all? Well, in The Gulch alone, right down the street from our offices, the ICON tower is still reaching skyward, and three other high-rises are rising within walking distance. The 1,000-foot-plus Signature Tower still hasn't materialized, but here's hoping for a groundbreaking this year. — **W.A.**

12. BUBBLING OVER WITH TEA

Bubble tea is a funny beverage, one that you sip *and* chew. It starts with green or black tea as its base, with creamy stuff and your choice of fruit flavor added. But the special twist is at the bottom of the cup: addictively chewy spheres of tapioca. The phenomenon started in Asia and has been spreading to the U.S. Nashville got its first dedicated bubble tea purveyor, Fat Straw (1200 Villa Place in Edgehill Village, 320-4999) this year. — **D.K.F.**

13. RISSI PALMER'S BREAKOUT SUCCESS

A country hit in Nashville? Yeah, one's born every minute. What makes Rissi Palmer's success so exceptional is that she's the first African-American woman to accomplish this feat in well over three decades. Thanks to her single "Country Girl," our faith is restored in the fact that music sees in talent, not in color. — **SHELLIE R. WARREN**

14. GOT A THING FOR YUENGLING

East Coasters have long paid chump change for a sixer of toothsome craft brew, thanks to Pennsylvania brewery Yuengling. Nashville was left out until this summer, when suddenly shelves across town were filled with their delicious lager, black & tan and surprisingly good light variety. It's no Yazoo, but we welcome anything this affordably refreshing into our gullets. — **W.A.**

15. STEVIE WONDER AT SOMMET

There was no shortage of oddness, from meandering homilies to an onstage guest who overstayed his welcome, during Nashville's stop on Stevie Wonder's first tour in a decade, but the high points more than made up for it. I mean, who wouldn't sit through a platitude or

two to hear liberal doses of the epochal likes of "Talking Book," "Innervisions" and "Songs in the Key of Life?" — **BILL FRISKICS-WARREN**

16. LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS FISH

The Nashville tradition of hot chicken has been on the national foodie radar for a while, but 2007 was the year that hot fish got some love, too. *Gourmet* magazine devoted space to Nashville's hot fish in October, and Roadfood gurus Jane and Michael Stern went on NPR's *Splendid Table* to extol the merits of the massive fish sandwiches at East Side Fish (2617 Gallatin Pike, 227-8388). Download the segment if you want to hear public radio hosts try to define "krunkest." — **D.K.F.**

17. WHAT? IT'S FINISHED?

It took almost seven years, but work on Briley Parkway between I-40 East and Opryland is finished. There was no cannonade, no fireworks display, no memorial poem; just some bewildered motorist surrounded by freshly painted lanes and miles of room one day in mid-August. May the orange barrels never return. — **W.A.**

18. NEW SHOPS AT THE MALL AT GREEN HILLS

While Green Hills has always offered plenty of options for those who aren't on a budget, the mall's owners hit the mark in 2007 when they added two new uber-luxurious offerings, Tiffany & Co. and Louis Vuitton, each of which opened with a lavish bash. Ladies all over town were left praying for something monogrammed or wrapped in a little blue box for Christmas. No pressure, gentlemen. — **H.B.**

19. YOU SAW WHO? WHERE?

2007 was a great year for spotting celebrities in Nashville. Jon Bon Jovi and Richie Sambora popped up to film the video for "Make a Memory" at Layl'a. Jessica Simpson and Jewel joined the throngs making debut country albums. Jamie Foxx and Nicole Kidman showed up at the CMA Awards. Most recently, film star John C. Reilly turned in a spirited performance as Dewey Cox at Mercy Lounge. Wonder who'll be hitting the town in '08? — **H.B.**

20. IT'S AL GOOD

The former vice president did his home state proud in Norway this year when he was honored for his efforts to combat global warming. He's only the second Tennessean ever to win the award (former secretary of state Cordell Hull was the first, in 1945), so naturally we're quite proud. — **W.A.**

21. SMOKERS STILL HAVE SPACES

While most of our favorite listening rooms and watering holes are smoke-free these days, a few holdouts went the opposite direction, banning the youngsters and puffing away proudly. We don't have anything against our nicotine-addicted brethren and sistren, we just don't want to breathe their fumes. Thanks to spots such as Gold Rush and 3 Crow Bar, we don't have to. — **KRISTIN WHITTLESEY**