

Updated: January 11, 2021

# Best of Business 2021: Food, drink and marijuana



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The Bean Counter has opened a new location on Grove Street, offering parking outside and plenty of seating inside.

**B**ean Counter Bakery Owner Alice Lombardi worked as an engineer in the corporate world when she decided to leave to spend more time with her children, back in 1998.

Her employer tried to keep her, enticing her with remote work options long before working from home would become a typical job setup. Still, she said, the balance didn't feel like enough.

"I am a perfectionist," Lombardi said. "I've either got to do it the right way or no way at all. So I decided to just quit."

Always an avid baker, she began bringing baked goods to mom groups and coffee hours in her neighborhood. After one mother suggested she sell her treats to local restaurants, Lombardi obtained a residential kitchen license.

"I would take care of the kids during the day, then they would go to bed and I would bake all night," Lombardi said. "And then the next morning I would, after the kids got out of school ... they would be in the back of

my car and I'd be driving to deliver these products with the kids screaming in the back."

Through these new business contacts, Lombardi met, and eventually bought, the Bean Counter business.

"I knew nothing about running any food service," Lombardi said, who added people told her she would fail within a year.

Two decades later, however, Lombardi runs a thriving business, having opened a new flagship location on Grove Street in Worcester in 2020, while operating a branch on Highland Street, as well as a location on Route 9 in Shrewsbury.

"People in Worcester, they love their local businesses," Lombardi said.

A stickler for efficiency, Lombardi is laser focused on maintaining best production practices, keeping her employees happy, and providing niche environments for her customers to cozy up in. The best lesson she's learned along the way, she said, is to trust her gut.

"That's where your experience takes you," Lombardi said, referring to her longevity in the baking business as a key business asset.

-- Monica Busch

**Notable runners-up:** BirchTree Bread Co., Inhouse Coffee

### **BEST MARIJUANA COMPANY**

Cultivate

**Location:** Leicester, Framingham & Uxbridge, [www.cultivatemass.com](http://www.cultivatemass.com)

**Top executive:** Founder & CEO Sam Barber

**Founded:** 2018

**Employees:** 130



Cultivate strives to ensure customers feel like they're part of a family, by offering comprehensive customer service and premium homegrown products. The dispensary donates 10% of its profits every month to an organization serving those in need. In the reopening following its shutdown during the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic, Cultivate went beyond the state's guidelines to place extra emphasis on safety.

**Notable runners-up:** Good Chemistry, Verilife

### **BEST AFTER-WORK BAR**

## Most Popular



**N.J. trust pays \$1M for 47 Worcester apartments**



**Milford cannabis growing site sells for \$5M**



**NewCorr Packaging completes 40K-sq-ft Northborough addition**

One Eleven Chop House

**Location:** Worcester, [www.111chophouse.com](http://www.111chophouse.com)

**Top executives:** Owners Robb and Madeleine Ahlquist, President Caitlyn Carolan, and General Manager Aaron Francisco

**Founded:** 1999

**Employees:** 77

The wine list at One Eleven has received Wine Spectator's Award of Excellence annually since 2001. The restaurant couples this with specially crafted cocktails of the moment and draft beer sourced from New England's top craft breweries.

**Notable runners-up:** VIA Italian Table, Tavern in the Square

### **BEST RESTAURANT FOR BUSINESS LUNCH**

The Sole Proprietor

**Location:** Worcester, [www.thesole.com](http://www.thesole.com)

**Top executives:** Owners Robb and Madeleine Ahlquist, President Caitlyn Carolan, and General Manager Eric Andreoli

**Founded:** 1979

**Employees:** 98



For 41 years, The Sole has not only offered the freshest seafood prepared in a variety of ways, but consistently provided above-and-beyond hospitality with every meal. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, The Sole switched to MERV 13 air filtration, personal protective equipment for staff, extensive safety training, outdoor dining, curbside pick-up, and a new online fresh fish market and takeout system.

**Notable runners-up:** VIA Italian Table, Sonoma Restaurant at Beechwood Hotel, 110 Grill

### **BEST RESTAURANT FOR BUSINESS DINNER**

One Eleven Chop House\*

**Location:** Worcester, [www.111chophouse.com](http://www.111chophouse.com)

**Top executives:** Owners Robb and Madeleine Ahlquist, President Caitlyn Carolan, and General Manager Aaron Francisco

**Founded:** 1999

**Employees:** 77

The independent family-owned restaurant rivals the best steakhouses in the country by listening to customers and exceeding their expectations for quality, presentation and flavor. During the coronavirus pandemic, One Eleven still offered a wide selection of meats while introducing online ordering and tenderloin kits.

**Notable runners-up:** Sonoma Restaurant at Beechwood Hotel, The Sole Proprietor

**BEST CATERER FOR A CORPORATE EVENT**

Peppers Artful Events

**Location:** Northborough, [www.PeppersArtfulEvents.com](http://www.PeppersArtfulEvents.com)

**Top executive:** Co-Owners Susan and John Lawrence

**Founded:** 1987

**Employees:** 150-200

Much of 2020 at Peppers was spent working with clients to change event dates, find new venues, and overhaul their entire event logistics, including changing the way food was served. As the coronavirus pandemic entered the fall, Peppers began offering food at the Farmer and Fork Cafe at Tower Hill, launched online, and introduced Prepared by Peppers weekend takeout.

**Notable runners-up:** Struck Catering, Creedon & Co., Inc.

**BEST LOCAL BREWERY**

Wormtown Brewery

**Location:** Worcester & Foxborough, [www.wormtownbrewry.com](http://www.wormtownbrewry.com)

**Top executive:** Managing Partner David Fields

**Founded:** 2010

**Employees:** 50+



For more than 10 years, Wormtown has kept a passion for making the best beer at the heart of everything it does. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the brewery started expanding its taproom to allow for more people to come into its space, along with its contactless drive-thru.

**Notable runners-up:** Greater Good Imperial Brewing Co., Tree House Brewing Co. Wachusett Brewing Co., Redemption Rock Brewing Co.

