

# St. Johns has Spirit

Why it's hard not to cheer for this historic neighborhood

By Shanon Emerson | Photos by Joel Masters

Everybody in Portland has heard of St. Johns. But what do we really know about it? To understand and appreciate St. Johns, you have to go way back—to the beginning. It was 1846 when James John first settled in the area that would later bear his name. This was two years before the Oregon Territory was established. John was on the cutting edge and always thinking of the future. ►

Wel's Cyclery



Born in Ohio, John was among the first of the Midwest transplants who would eventually call Oregon home. He was living in nearby Linnton when he decided to move north across the river to officially settle. According to local lore, he was a bit of a recluse—portlandneighborhood.com refers to him as “a kindly hermit”—leading the population of the town he pioneered to refer to him as “Saint John.”

However he earned his nickname, John was the first in a long line of St. John's cheerleaders, and his spirit persists to this day, a century-and-a-half later. If you've ever talked to someone from St. John's, you know this is true. You half expect them to break out the pompons and shout, “Gimme an S, gimme a T...”

Seriously though, if you let them, the proud denizens of St. John's will sit you down and tell you how fabulous their neighborhood is and what they're doing in the community to make it even better. They've been doing this for a long time. Even the historic and picturesque St. John's Bridge was the result of the community getting together to raise money and support.

While St. John's is no longer its own city—Portland snapped it up, along with Linnton, in 1915—it still has the feel of a place all its own. So it's no surprise that residents refer to the heart of St. John's (essentially Lombard Street) as “downtown.”

Driving west on Lombard, you'll officially enter St. John's when you cross the railroad tracks. Once you're over the tracks,

keep an eye out for a little building with three giant letters in the front window: B-B-Q. This is **Big Kahuna's BBQ** (8221 N Lombard St. 522-4012, [bigkahunasbbq.com](http://bigkahunasbbq.com)), where Gary (a.k.a. Big Kahuna) has been grilling all your favorite meats, including Spam, since 2003.

A little closer to downtown is **Leisure Public House** (8002 N Lombard St, [leisurepublichouse.com](http://leisurepublichouse.com)), where the tally of leisure activities is high: movies, ping pong, bocce, open mics, trivia night and, most importantly, eating and drinking on the patio in the sunshine.

If you stray off Lombard, south on Ivanhoe, you'll find the **St. John's Theater & Pub** (8203 N Ivanhoe St. 283-8520, [mcmenamins.com](http://mcmenamins.com)). Yes, it's yet another McMenamins, but how can anyone complain when these are the facts: beer, burgers and cheap movies served up in a nicely preserved building that was moved to St. John's after it was used as an exhibit hall in Portland's 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition.

Back on Lombard, **Weir's Cyclery** (8247 N Lombard St. 283-3883, [weircyclery.com](http://weircyclery.com)) provides St. John's riders with bikes, accessories and repair service.

Providing what some might consider an even more important service is **Signal Station Pizza** (8302 N Lombard St. 286-2257, [signalstationpizza.com](http://signalstationpizza.com)). Located in a vintage gas station, this place is more than just a novelty. They make many of their

ingredients in-house, including the pizza dough, which is made fresh daily.

The folks at **Tulip Pastry Shop** (8322 N Lombard St, 286-3444) were making cupcakes and maple bars well before it was hip. But the real fun comes with their made-to-order cakes. They'll create a cake in almost any shape you can imagine. Yep, that shape, too.

Dogs and cats rejoice! Recently opened **Tre Bone** (8326 N Lombard St, 971-255-0772, [trebone.net](http://trebone.net)) sells only the highest quality pet food on the market. Did you hear that, Fido? You'll never have to read a label again.

Hipsters and record nerds began rejoicing 12 years ago when **Vinyl Resting Place** (8332 N Lombard St, 247-9573, [vinylrestingplaceusa.com](http://vinylrestingplaceusa.com)) started selling records in this 'hood. Their varied collection can be browsed in the store and on their website.

Luck your newly acquired Pat Benatar record under your arm and head to **John Street Café** (8338 N Lombard St, 247-1066), which also set up camp in St. Johns over a decade ago. They offer good food in a warm atmosphere that feels a little like home.

If you want a glimpse of the future, go to **Blue Moon Camera & Machine** (8417 N Lombard St, 978-0333, [bluemooncamera.com](http://bluemooncamera.com)). Just like bellbottoms and leg warmers, someday people will return to their roots and start buying real film, taking non-digital photos and developing film instead of downloading it. You heard it here first.

Across the street, the bright, airy and earnest **Ladybug Organic Coffee** (8438 N Lombard St, 715-1006, [ladybugcoffee.com](http://ladybugcoffee.com)) offers a good place to write the great American novel or just gossip over a cup of coffee with a friend. ▶



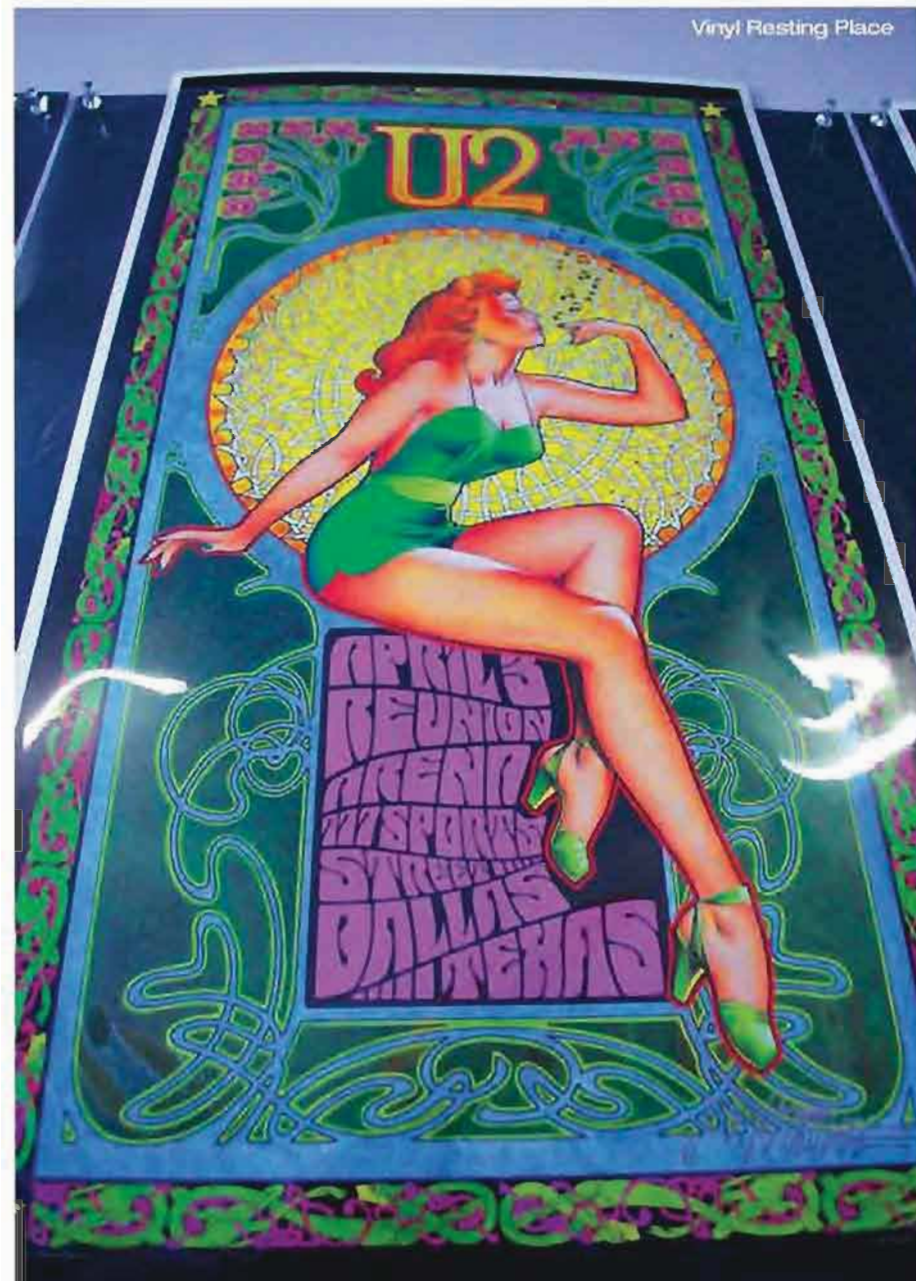
JUST LIKE BELLBOTTOMS AND LEG WARMERS, SOMEDAY PEOPLE WILL RETURN TO THEIR ROOTS AND START BUYING REAL FILM, TAKING NON-DIGITAL PHOTOS AND DEVELOPING FILM INSTEAD OF DOWNLOADING IT. YOU HEARD IT HERE FIRST.



Signal Station Pizza



Vinyl Resting Place



The not-so-earnest **Pattie's Homeplate Café & Fountain** (8601 N Lombard St, 289-7285, [pattieshomeplatecafeandfountain.lbu.com](http://pattieshomeplatecafeandfountain.lbu.com)) has all their bases covered when it comes to diner food. Add a few old-timers drinking coffee and discussing the weather, and you've got a scene familiar to anyone who's had a couple over-easies at a small-town diner.

In St. Johns you can go from diner to dive bar in just a few paces. **Slim's Cocktail Bar & Restaurant** (8635 N Lombard St, 288-3854) is another great neighborhood gathering place. If you don't like gathering, it's also a great place to have a beer with breakfast. Plus, with a name like Slim's, it's gotta be good.

A few doors down at **Atomic Daylight** (8711 N Lombard St, [atomiodaylight.com](http://atomiodaylight.com)) craft, art and fashion meet. Here you'll find clothing and accessories made by local designers using a combination of new and recycled materials. Shop at Atomic Daylight and you'll never end up at a party wearing the same dress as your ex-boyfriend's new girlfriend.

Cross the street and you'll spot the new-timers' version of Pattie's. **Anna Bananas** (8716 N Lombard St, 288-2030, [annabannanascOFFEE.com](http://annabannanascOFFEE.com)) is another neighborhood gathering place for the St. Johns set. It's places like this that give the neighborhood that small-town-within-a-small-town feel.

A little farther off the grid is **Writers' Dojo & Ecole de Budo RAJI International** (7518 N Chicago Ave, [writersdojo.org](http://writersdojo.org), [ecoledebudo.com](http://ecoledebudo.com)). The Writers' Dojo is a membership-only writers' haven. Members can enjoy a quiet place to work and regular access to other writers trying to meet deadlines or tap the creativity fountain. Ecole de Budo RAJI International is a martial arts school specializing in Aikido, Judo and Iaido. Writing and martial arts sharing a space? Only in St. Johns.

From the kindly hermit to hipsters buying vinyl, St. Johns has a long history that permeates the neighborhood—but it's not moldering in the past. As one of Portland's most affordable neighborhoods, it continues to grow, and more great businesses continue to set up shop on Lombard. Check it out, and you might decide to do the same. At the very least, you'll probably get out those pompons and start the St. Johns cheer. Gimme a T... **POT**