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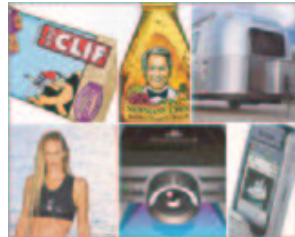
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America's Best Discoveries



This country bursts at the seams with excellent and amusing people, places, ideas, and innovations. You'll find a complete list of our winners below (in six categories:

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[Legacies](#), [Passions](#), [Adventures](#), [Innovations](#), [Time Off](#), and [Connections](#))

along with links to Web sites where you can find out more about the best of the best.

We hope you'll be inspired to add your voice -- and your nominations -- to next year's issue. [Click here](#) to help us make selections for the Best of America 2005.

America's Best Legacies

Best Observer: Photographer **Jake Rajs**, who took the awe-inspiring photos you can find in his book [These United States](#).

Best Fair Food: The **Minnesota State Fair** takes the prize with over 500 kinds of food -- everything from corn dogs to deep-fried cheese curds.

Best Movies: We worked with Dr. Rick Jewel of **USC's School of Cinema-Television** to come up with the eight flicks that best define the American character. Our finalists are: *Singin' in the Rain*, *Citizen Kane*, *Annie Hall*, *The Godfather*, *The Godfather Part II*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Casablanca*, *All About Eve*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Best Lost Cause: Die-hard **Chicago Cubs** fans have suffered with a team that hasn't won the World Series since 1908.

Best Big Idea: The American Dream. The idea -- and reality -- that anything can be accomplished in this great nation of ours.

Best Small-Town Festival: Six million tulips give small-town pride a distinctly Dutch accent at the **Tulip Time Festival** -- dancers in wooden clogs entertain and a Town Crier contest is a hoot.

Best Prom: The students at **Pennsbury High School** make a big deal out of their big day. Though the event is still held in the gym, a red carpet greets the teens, who make their grand entrances in everything from helicopters to motorized stegosaurus.

Best Sports Rivalry: For old-fashioned rivalry, nothing beats the purity of **Army-Navy Football**, fought tooth and nail since 1890.

Best Quilting Bee: The **International Quilt Festival** is the World's Fair of its kind. Its four-day run draws up to 40,000 people.

Best Political Web Site: Run by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics, [www.opensecrets.org](#) helps you gauge where a politician stands -- and with whom.

Best Public Servant: New York Attorney General **Eliot Spitzer** has taken on Mafia dons, corporate swindlers, sweatshops, spammers, Wall Street, and more.

Best Public Restroom: The **third-floor ladies room** of the **Grand Casino Biloxi in Mississippi** was voted Best Restroom in America in a 2003 survey by "hygiene solution" provider **Cintas Corp.** The loo has Victorian styling, an atrium-like vanity area, and a gilded chandelier.

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Best Tourist Attraction: The only U.S. city with its own King [Memphis](#) is home to barbecue, the blues, and the birthplace of rock 'n' roll.

Best Mom&Pop Biz: [Clif Bar Inc.](#), founded by Gary Erickson in 1990, is now a \$100 million business run by Gary and his wife, Kit.

America's Best Passions

Best Use of \$1 Million: When 12-year-old [Hope Stout](#) was diagnosed with cancer, the [Make-A-Wish Foundation](#) contacted her. Though she had visions of being on TV or being a model, she decided that her wish would be for the 155 children on the local Make-A-Wish waiting list to get their wishes first. Locals raised over \$1 million to help Hope's dream come true.

Best Charity Innovation: Thanks to [Charity Navigator](#) and [GuideStar](#) you can get the lowdown on a charity before you give. Charity Navigator rates nonprofits on efficiency and growth. Guidestar displays the forms charities file with the IRS.

Best Charity-Minded Celebrity: [Paul Newman](#), founder of the [Newman's Own](#) brand of salad dressings, lemonade, popcorn and more, has used the brand to raise millions of dollars for various charities.

Best Gurus: [Stephen Covey's](#) bestseller, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, offers life-changing advice. Or tune in to [Dr. Phil](#) on weekdays for a taste of his get-real credo of personal responsibility.

Best Quiet Philanthropist Seventy-three-year-old [Charles Feeney](#) earned billions as co-founder of Duty Free Shoppers. Then in 1982 he transferred his stake in DFS to [Atlantic Philanthropies](#)-- an organization he used to anonymously give away billions of dollars.

Best Healer: [Wendy Ring, MD](#), makes rounds in her [Mobile Medical Office](#) to treat the people of rural Northern California who have no health care. "We don't turn anyone away," says Ring.

Best Campus Leader: [Brown University](#) president [Ruth Simmons](#), the first African American to head an Ivy League school, encourages political debate and intellectual diversity among Brown's students.

Best Interviewer: [Tim Russert](#) of NBC's *Meet the Press* is known for his polite, but persistent style of grilling that, more often than not, gets the truth.

Best Guilty Pleasure: Milk or dark? Either way, San Francisco's [Guittard Chocolate Company](#) sets the standard.

Best Principal: [Doug Lowery](#), principal of Hilliard (Ohio) Memorial, was named 2004 National Middle School Principal of the Year.

Best Free College: [Deep Springs College](#) in California offers a two-year education for free, provided students don't mind bailing hay, milking cows, and slaughtering hogs when they're not hitting the books. After graduation, most Deep Springs alums make their way to top four-year schools like Harvard and Yale.

America's Best Adventures

Best Risk-Taker: In July, [Tanya Streeter](#) broke the world freediving record, beating both men and women in the variable-weight category.

Best Explorer: [Mike Fay](#) was gored repeatedly by an elephant last year but that hasn't stopped him from working to create 13 national parks in the African nation of Gabon.

Best Drive: [The Angeles Crest Highway](#) is beautiful *and* offers enough twists and turns to challenge any driver's skills. "It's definitely not someplace you'd want to mess up," says [Andre Idzikowski](#) of *Car and Driver* magazine. "Because if you do, you could go over the edge."

Best Adrenaline Rush: [Thrillseekers Unlimited](#) is a Vegas adventure company where you can try 15 hair-raising activities, like street luge or a 12,000-foot tandem skydive with a 100 m.p.h. free fall.

Best Way to Travel: Book a trip through PrivateRailCars.net and you'll be wined and dined in your own private railroad car.

Best Flashlight: Check the bushes for bears or play cards in your tent with the [Black Diamond Gemini II hybrid LED/xenon headlamp](#).

Best T-Shirt: [The M.J. Soffe Dri-release T-shirt](#). Treated with Freshguard, it wicks away moisture and helps limit the, ah, stink of sweaty pastimes.

Best Boot: The favorite of construction workers, farmers, and weekend do-it-yourselfers? The [Wolverine DuraShock SR](#), with slip-resistant sole and steel toe -- and as comfortable as sneakers.

Best Kayak: Tops is the [Napali Kayak](#). Transparent, collapsible, weighs 26 pounds, and fits in a backpack.

Best Zoo: Omaha's [Henry Doorly Zoo](#) boasts North America's largest cat complex, as well as the world's biggest indoor desert, rain forest, swamp, and nocturnal exhibits.

Best Beach: Hawaii's beaches are the unquestionable champs, but our pick for the best continental U.S. sands is [Hermosa Beach](#), an hour's drive from downtown L.A.

Best Day Job: This year's to-do list for self-taught paleontologist and marine archeologist [Sue Hendrickson](#)? Excavate a shipwreck off Cuba, explore a sunken Egyptian city, and hunt dinosaurs in the American West.

Best Roller Coaster: Revenge of the Mummy, at [Universal Studios](#), is the scariest four minutes you'll have this summer.

Best Layover: Stuck at the airport? Pray you're in [Orlando](#), where you can get everything from facials and massages to movies on InMotion DVD players.

Best Bus: [The Bus](#), as it's known in Oahu, has twice received top awards from the [American Public Transportation Association](#)

Best Fishing:

The fish: Largemouth bass, because at 17 pounds and up, they fight like hell and are a challenge to catch.

The best places to catch them: Havre de Grace, MD; Northern California's Sacramento River delta; Santee Cooper lakes, SC; and Lake Guntersville, AL.

Best New Fitness Craze: Trapeze classes are the new aerobics, says Dominique Jando, artistic director at [San Francisco's Circus Center](#). You don't have to live in San Francisco to try -- we found classes for adults and kids nationwide.

Best Getaway: In the sleek, 28-foot [Airstream International CCD](#), home follows you when adventure calls.

America's Best Innovations

Best Swimsuit: [Speedo's Fastskin FSII](#) was modeled after a shark's textured hide -- pure genius that reduces drag by 4 percent. The U.S. Olympic team will be wearing them in Athens this summer.

Best Birthing Center: The [Charleston Room](#) at [The Maternity Center](#) in Bethesda, MD, feels more like a hotel suite than a hospital room. The center has private Jacuzzis, rocking chairs, music -- and they let everyone from husbands to acupuncturists stay in the birthing room.

Best Robot: [NASA's Space Twins](#) traveled to Mars to search for signs of ancient water and sent us back unforgettable images of the red planet.

Best Family Act: The [Vacanti Brothers](#), all physicians at Harvard, are pioneers in a new specialty called tissue engineering. Their goal is to fashion replacement body parts from scratch, using a person's own cells.

Best Gadgets: Technology just keeps getting cooler. The evidence [Sony Ericsson's P900 camcorder cell phone](#) captures video clips to store or send [Mattel](#) debuts [Batman toys](#) in October that will take digital cues from the televised cartoon. And TMIO Inc's [web-savvy oven](#) will chill and cook your food.

Best Virtual Museum: Pay a visit to the [Smithsonian Institution](#) without ever leaving home.

Best Inventor: Dean Kamen, founder of [DEKA](#) and inventor of the Segway Human Transporter (that T-shaped scooter), has 150 patents to his name.

Best Architecture: Famed architect Frank Gehry's most recent project is the stunning new [Walt Disney Concert Hall](#).

Best Wheels: The classic car: [Hemi 'Cuda Convertible, 1970 or 1971](#). Craig Jackson of [Barrett-Jackson](#) auto auctioneers in Scottsdale, Arizona, calls this souped-up version of Plymouth's Barracuda the epitome of the muscle car.

Best Dating Games: Dive into **speed dating**, where multiple mini-dates (8 minutes max) may spark a spark. (Try [Hurrydate.com](#) or [8minutedating.com](#)) Or slow things down with [eHarmony.com](#), where you'll answer 500 compatibility questions. So far, the service has had over 2,500 pairings result in wedding bells.

America's Best Time Off

Best Public Golf Course: The [Bethpage Black Course](#), home to the 2002 U.S. Open, boasts the most enticing greens available to the public. Call the state reservation system at 516-249-0707 at 7 p.m. any night to reserve a tee time.

Best Brains and Brawn: [Stanford's](#) athletic program is one of the best -- and the university consistently ranks among the nation's academic elite. They boast a stellar 90% student-athlete graduation rate.

Best Non-Chain Fast Food: No question, it's the [Super Duper Weenie](#) in Fairfield, CT.

Best Country Song: [Hank Williams's](#) painful and poignant "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" takes the honors.

Best Fun & Games: Aside from our own [Fun & Games](#) channel, these are our favorite ways to have fun: Invite friends and family over with a [invite](#); be the star of the show with a [PlayStation 2 Eye Toy](#); [Conga, Cariboo, Cosmo, Cadoo and Zigity](#) are our favorite board games -- all are offshoots of the ever-popular Cranium; [moblogs](#) (a way for "mobile" people to "log" pics from a photo phone), like the ones available at [textamerica.com](#) are the hot way to show off your pictures; and both [futurememories.com](#) and [easy123art.com](#) will turn your favorite photos into paint-by-number kits.

Best Live Music Venue: The [Red Rocks Amphitheatre](#), 15 miles west of Denver, is *the* place to see a show.

Best Public Library: The state-of-the-art [Cerritos Library](#) in Los Angeles County, CA, boasts a titanium exterior that changes color in the light, information stands modeled after concierge desks, a kids' area featuring a full-size [rex](#) replica, and much more.

Best Catch: Canine disc champion Kodiak and his handler, Gary Shockley, tossed and fetched their way to the head of the pack at the most recent [Disc Dog Nationals](#) and the Purina Incredible Dog Challenge.

Best Ballpark: Sportswriters and players alike rate the [Pittsburgh Pirates' PNC Park](#) as No. 1.

Best Comedian: [Jon Stewart's The Daily Show](#) is a guaranteed laugh.

Best Houseplant: [Orchids](#) are the hot trend in indoor plants -- and they're easier to grow than they look.

Best Mascots: The [Philadelphia Phillie Phanatic](#) has been delighting crowds since 1978, and the quirky [Banana Slug of the University of California, Santa Cruz](#) reminds fans that games are supposed to be fun.

America's Best Connections

Best Parade: Let's face it, the [Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade](#) is in a class by itself.

But if you like your holidays a tiny bit twisted, Fort Lauderdale's [Singular Winterfest Boat Parade](#) has floats that really float. On dry land, the [Doo Dah Parade](#) in Pasadena is a silly spoof on the [Tournament of Roses](#)

Best Tailgate Party: Any tailgate bash will be complete with the following items:

- **BBQ Sauce:** [Roadhouse Hot & Spicy](#) lives up to its name.
- **Cooker:** The [Freedom Grill](#) hooks on the back of your vehicle with a standard hitch.
- **Beer:** Our three faves are [Brooklyn Lager](#), [Rogue Ales Dead Guy Ale](#) and [Redhook ESB](#).
- **Cool Wheels:** The [Chevy SSR](#) is the most eye-popping two-seater ever.
- **Table Wine:** We polled the experts, and then we tasted [Hayman & Hill Russian River Valley Reserve Chardonnay](#), [Rancho Zabaco 2001 Dancing Bull Zinfandel](#) and [Renwood Winery 2001 Sierra Series Syrah](#) are tops.
- **Alterna-Soda:** [Vernor's Ginger Ale](#) has been a Detroit specialty for over 130 years.

Best Food Guide: No matter what you're craving, that burgundy bible, aka [Zagat's restaurant guide](#), will steer you right.

Best Chef: Thomas Keller, of [French Laundry](#) in Yountville, CA, is known for his sophisticated vision of French-influenced American food.

Best Cool Stuff

- **Car Tunes:** Buy a palm-size [Delphi XM Roady](#) and subscribe to [XM Satellite Radio](#).
- **Coffee Break:** Get a cup in a minute flat with [Keurig's Single Cup Coffee Maker](#).
- **Kids' Friend:** Remove crayon, grease, or some unidentified gook from the wall with [Mr. Clean Magic Eraser](#).
- **Cook's Tool:** [The KitchenArt Auto-Measure Spice Carousel](#) stores, measures, and dispenses.
- **Bathroom Gadget:** Wave your hand beneath the [Lentek Hands-free Soap Dispenser](#) for just enough soap or lotion.
- **Kitchen Magic:** Spray [Dawn's Power Dissolver](#) on your pots and pans and the baked-on gunk is gone.
- **Flood Insurance:** [OnSite PRO Washing Machine Valve Shut-off Kit](#) detects leaks and shuts off the water.

Best Corporate Uniform: Classic and cool, the [United Parcel Service's](#) uniforms are our hands-down favorites.

Best College Choir: The [Morgan State University Choir of Baltimore](#) has performed at the White House and Lincoln Center. You can hear their outstanding vocals on Wynton Marsalis's CD [All Rise](#)

Best Romantic Gesture: **Custom fragrance.** It's longer-lasting than roses, but not as, well, *permanent* as a tattoo. For her, [reflect.com](#). For him, [eleuria.com](#)

Best Memorial: The [WTC Memorial](#), scheduled to open in 2009, will be a powerful memory of that tragic day.

Best Young Composers: If you love Aaron Copland's music, try this CD [Rainbow Body](#), from the [Atlanta Symphony](#) with works by [Chris Theofanidis](#) and [Jennifer Higdon](#).

Best Regional Theater: Bravos go to the [Guthrie Theater](#) in Minneapolis!

Best Double Dutch Contest It's not just for boxers and little girls. Jump rope is cool again, and the very best takes place each December at the [Double Dutch Holiday Classic](#) at Harlem's [Apollo Theater](#).

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