

JULY 2026 \ \$4.99

MANKATO

MAGAZINE

THE ANNUAL STEINIE AWARDS

Imaginary awards given in
often absurd categories

INSIDE

Best of 2026
MANKATO

The Free Press

Cream of the crop

Celebrating some of
the Mankato area's finest

PILSNER PANDEMONIUM

More delicious
variants than
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Cafe serves up
coffee, fine food

DRESSING "PROFESSIONAL"

What is the
point and does
anyone care?

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Best of 2026
MANKATO
MAGAZINE
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Entertainment experience



ATMOSPHERE

- 1st Autumn Acres Farm
- 2nd Chankaska Creek Ranch, Winery, & Distillery
- 3rd Indian Island Winery

BEST TAKEOUT/CURBSIDE

- 1st Pagliai's Pizza
- 2nd Jake's Pizza
- 3rd Tokyo Sushi & Hibachi

BUSINESS LUNCH

- 1st Backyard Bar & Grill
- 2nd Nolabelle Kitchen + Bar
- 3rd Pub 500

CHAIN RESTAURANT

- 1st Buffalo Wild Wings
- 2nd Jersey Mike's Subs
- 3rd Applebee's Grill + Bar

FAMILY FUN

- 1st Autumn Acres Farm
- 2nd Wow! Zone
- 3rd Mankato Family YMCA

FAMILY RESTAURANT

- 1st WOW! Zone
- 2nd Backyard Bar & Grill
- 3rd Culver's

FINE DINING

- 1st Pappageorge Restaurant & Bar
- 2nd Number 4 American Bar & Kitchen
- 3rd Nolabelle Kitchen + Bar

FOOD TRUCK

- 1st Inspire Health & Wellness
- 2nd S&B BBQ
- 3rd Rêve Coffee Co.

GOLF COURSE

- 1st **Prairie Ridge Golf Course (P 11)**
- 2nd Mankato Golf Club
- 3rd North Links Golf Course

LIVE MUSIC VENUE

- 1st Indian Island Winery
- 2nd Vetter Stone Amphitheater
- 3rd Chankaska Creek Ranch, Winery & Distillery

LOCALLY OWNED RESTAURANT

- 1st Backyard Bar & Grill
- 2nd Pagliai's Pizza
- 3rd Pappageorge Restaurant & Bar

PATIO DINING

- 1st Indian Island Winery
- 2nd Tav on the Ave
- 3rd Chankaska Creek Ranch, Winery, & Distillery

SOCIAL LUNCH

- 1st Backyard Bar & Grill
- 2nd Tav On The Ave
- 3rd Nolabelle Kitchen + Bar

SPORTS BAR

- 1st **Tav on the Ave (P 12)**
- 2nd Big Dog
- 3rd Ummies Bar & Grill

TRAVEL AGENCY

- 1st **APTA Travel (Amber Pietan Travel) (P 13)**
- 2nd (tie) Emerald Travel & Cruises
- 2nd (tie) Travel and Cruise Center

BEST TRAVEL AGENCY:
APTA TRAVEL

Selling you a world of fun

Although Amber Pietan has visited many exotic locales as an adult, her introduction to travel was down-home and relatable.

"My family packed the cooler with cottage cheese, ham and carrots, piled in our Econoline Ford van and drove," said Pietan of her childhood travel adventures.

"We went to places like the Badlands, Yellowstone and the Tetons, stayed at campsites and in tents, cooked breakfast over fires. Those warm memories of camaraderie and togetherness are the feel-goods I like helping others create."

A travel agent with 27 years of experience, Pietan and her APTA Travel staff of nine can help you get almost anywhere in the world you want to go.

"Honeymoons, cruises, bucket list and all-inclusive vacations, Disney trips, international tours, spa getaways, packages for golf, ski or fitness, luxury trips, destination weddings — we do it all."

For skeptics who believe the Internet and a high-speed Wi-Fi connection are enough for making their globe-trotting plans, Pietan lays it on the line.

"Without a travel agent, you're on your own," she said, citing the purchasing power that comes with being an agency affiliated with a consortia of other travel agents.

"You'll get more amenities and credits working with a travel agency," Pietan said. "I saved one man \$2,000 due to promotions he didn't know about."

"Once you become a client, you're with us for a lifetime."

Since Pietan established APTA Travel in 2013, it's consistently made the "Best of Mankato" list.

"We're your greatest advocate," she said. "And we sell the world — minus Wisconsin Dells."



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