

adding some gourmet touches such as two cuts of Bill Kurtis's Tallgrass Beef (boneless rib eye and strip steaks), more cheeses in the cold case, and a slew of upscale condiments including 90 kinds of mustard and, as he puts it, "fancy, fancy salt." 3501 N. Lincoln Ave.; 773-248-6272, paulinameatmarket.com

**PEORIA PACKING BUTCHER SHOP**

The Peoria Packing shopping experience is decidedly unvarnished: don plastic gloves and head into the huge stainless-steel refrigerator at this pork specialist, where every USDA-inspected pig product imaginable—shoulder, ham, ribs, bacon, loin, trotters, ears, feet, and more—is piled high for the choosing. Afterwards, a butcher shop on premises will cut and trim meat to your specifications for free. Peoria's processing plant is right across the street, which means its product is as fresh as it gets. Poultry, catfish, beef, and homemade Italian sausage are also available. 1300 W. Lake St.; 312-738-1800

**WETTSTEIN'S ORGANIC FARM**

If the throngs at area farmers' markets are any indication, buying local is taking off. Meat lovers—including Paul Kahan of Blackbird—have long sought out the hand-raised meats from Dennis and Emily Wettstein of Wettstein's Organic Farm in Carlock, Illinois (east of Bloomington-Normal). Their certified organic and pasture-grazed beef, pork, lamb, and chicken can be yours, too. On the second and fourth Saturdays during the summer, the Wettsteins make the long trek to the Oak Park Farmers' Market (at Lake Street and Elmwood Avenue, now through October), where they sell their popular bacon, pork chops, ground beef, chicken breasts, flank steak, and lamb chops. At other times of the year, they'll take phone orders and deliver via personal rendezvous to the Buzz Cafe in Oak Park at 905 South Lombard Avenue. 2100 U.S. Highway 150, Carlock; 309-376-7291

**SAUSAGES & PREPARED MEATS**

**C. P. MEAT MARKET**

It was a tough call whether to list C. P. Meat Market as a top-grade butcher or a sausage specialist. Owned by Ken Vicich and Bill Przybylski, the full-service meat market located in sleepy New Lenox, near Joliet, has been doling out cuts of prime beef, pork, veal, and chicken since 1976 at its neat and tidy retail store, situated next to a beauty salon in a low-key strip mall. And while C. P. Market's grilling staples are way above average—notably, the gorgeously thick prime porterhouse steaks and boneless marinated chicken breasts that will turn your head—the house-made sausages are a special treat. Start with the fresh pork breakfast links, not too salty and juicy as all get-out. And the brats—perfectly seasoned and extralong, to boot—are to die for. You'll say goodbye to Johnsonville forever. 1312 N. Cedar Rd., New Lenox; 815-485-3629

**DREYMLER & KRAY**

Heaven is a ripe heirloom tomato, crisp lettuce, and Dreymler & Kray bacon on toasted sourdough. Nestled in the northwest corner of Kane County, this old-fashioned butcher shop dates from 1929. The remote location probably explains why word about owner Ed Reiser's cured and smoked meats has only lately begun to get around. Cut thick, and smoked for at least 15 hours over either hickory or applewood, his bacon marries deep smoke flavor with a subtle sweetness. Some folks know him simply as the Bacon Man, but Reiser is no one-trick pony: he also turns out a fine smoked pheasant, pork chops, ribs, and hams cured with honey from a nearby producer, plus corned beef and an array of fresh, smoked, and dried sausages. In Chicago, Fox & Obel and Treasure Island carry Dreymler & Kray products including the bacon (the business also takes orders over the phone and through its Web

site). But if ever there was a reason to drive miles past corn and soybean fields, this is it. 140 S. State St., Hampshire; 847-683-2271, www.dreymlerandkray.com

**GENE'S SAUSAGE SHOP & DELICATESSEN**

You'll know you've reached Gene's when you spot the life-size sculpture of a cow that presides benevolently over this robust Polish deli and sausage shop in Belmont Craigin. Nearly 50 kinds of Polish sausages are smoked in-house and made fresh by the owners every couple of days, including the familiar wiejska variety, swojska (a rustic sausage), and krakowska (typically served as a cold cut). The handmade sausages hang seductively along the wall behind the store's seemingly endless refrigerated deli case and have a deep, rich flavor, owing to the fact that they require few preservatives given their short journey from the butcher's block to the plate. 5330 W. Belmont Ave.; 773-777-6322

**ROMANIAN KOSHER SAUSAGE COMPANY**

From the gruff service to its bare-bones décor, an Old World aura permeates this spare temple of meat, where everything is kosher from the sausage casings to the turkeys in the open freezers. The house-made salamis come in three sizes—small, medium, and large—and the flavor of the aged, hard variety is concentrated, zingy, and lightly garlicky. Rumor has it that meat-loving pilgrims come from as far away as Israel to sample Romanian's fare, and the owners claim that hard-salami zealots have on occasion bought out the store's entire stock. We think the pastrami, which is lean yet rich and peppery, may be the best in the city. 7200 N. Clark St.; 773-761-4141

**THE ORIGINAL NOTTOLI & SON**

Owner George Nottoli's grandfather started out in 1947 selling sausages from a truck on Chicago's West Side, and the small Italian store that bears his name

has been a neighborhood institution since 1971. The customers, who are on a first-come, first-served basis with Nottoli the Younger and with one another, dole out on the deli counter's fantastic sandwiches and homey sauces. But the shop's claim to fame is its small selection of exceptional Italian salami in six varieties—four kinds of mild, hot, and extra-hot. Nottoli still makes the way his grandfather did, though in huge volume, up to 3,000 pounds a day during the summer season. The non-Italian-style mild garlic sausage—delicious and fully fresh—is itself worth a trip. "We're picky about the quality of our meat and the time to trim it well," says Nottoli. The store also carries hard-to-find prosciutto for flavoring sauces and 7652 W. Belmont Ave.; 773-589-1010, www.nottoli.com

**SCHMEISSER'S HOMEMADE SAUSAGES**

According to owner Kurt Schmeisser, "guys who grow up eating meat are the main clientele at a venerable meatatorium in Niles. Schmeisser's is old to its core: it makes its own sausages—frankfurters, sticks, smoked Thuringian knackwurst—from the trimmings of the prime beef and top-quality pork and veal. All are all butchered on premises from hanging sides. Schmeisser, the business's principal butcher, learned the trade at the knee of his grandfather, a butcher from Germany who worked in Chicago's fabled stockyards and opened the store in 1951. In addition to his gourmet meat counter, Schmeisser's is also one of the very few places that will sell you a "half cattle" (i.e., an entire side of beef), butcher it in custom cuts, and package it for freezing. That's 200 pounds of USDA prime, folks, and set you back \$1,200. During the holidays, the shop brings in succulent organic Hokkaido turkeys from Waterman, Illinois. 7649 N. Milwaukee Ave.; 847-967-8995