

VAXXED AND DONE?

MODERNA'S CEO  
ON WHAT'S NEXT

DON'T BE TRASHY

GREEN LIVING  
MADE EASY

SIN CITY

LATE NIGHT  
ON ROUTE 1

ALL NEW!

TOP MORTGAGE  
PROS

# Boston

WHO

SHOT

BIG

PAPI?



APRIL 2022

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BY MIKE DAMIANO



**WHEN**

**HOOD**

The infamous highway north of Boston is charming, cheeky, and yeah, a little bit cheesy. It's also one of my favorite places. An ode to an asphalt jungle still trapped in time.

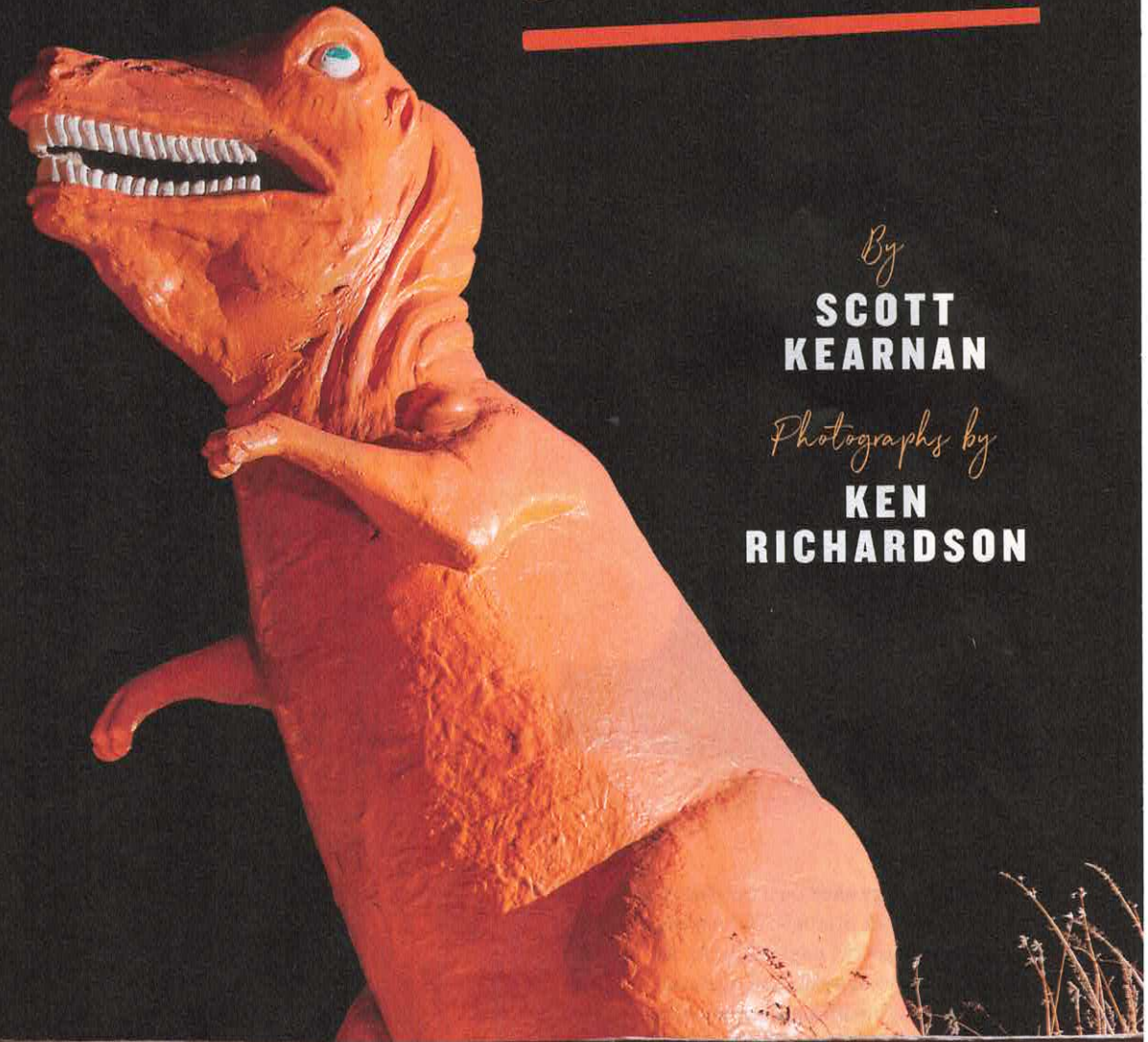






**RULED**

**THE EARTH**



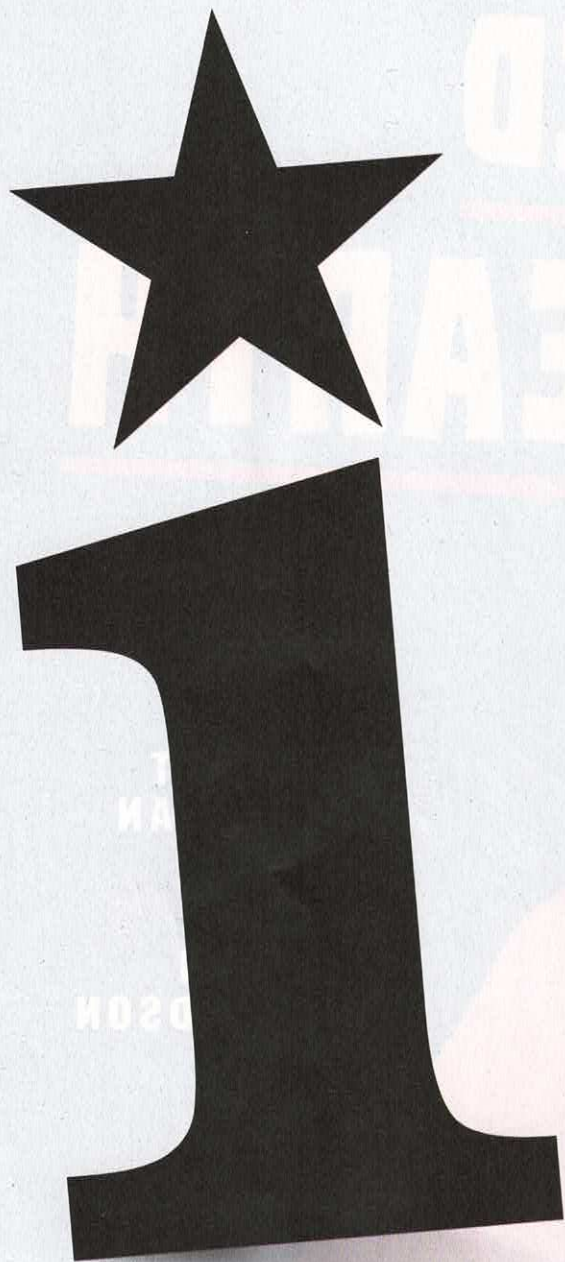
*By*

**SCOTT  
KEARNAN**

*Photographs by*

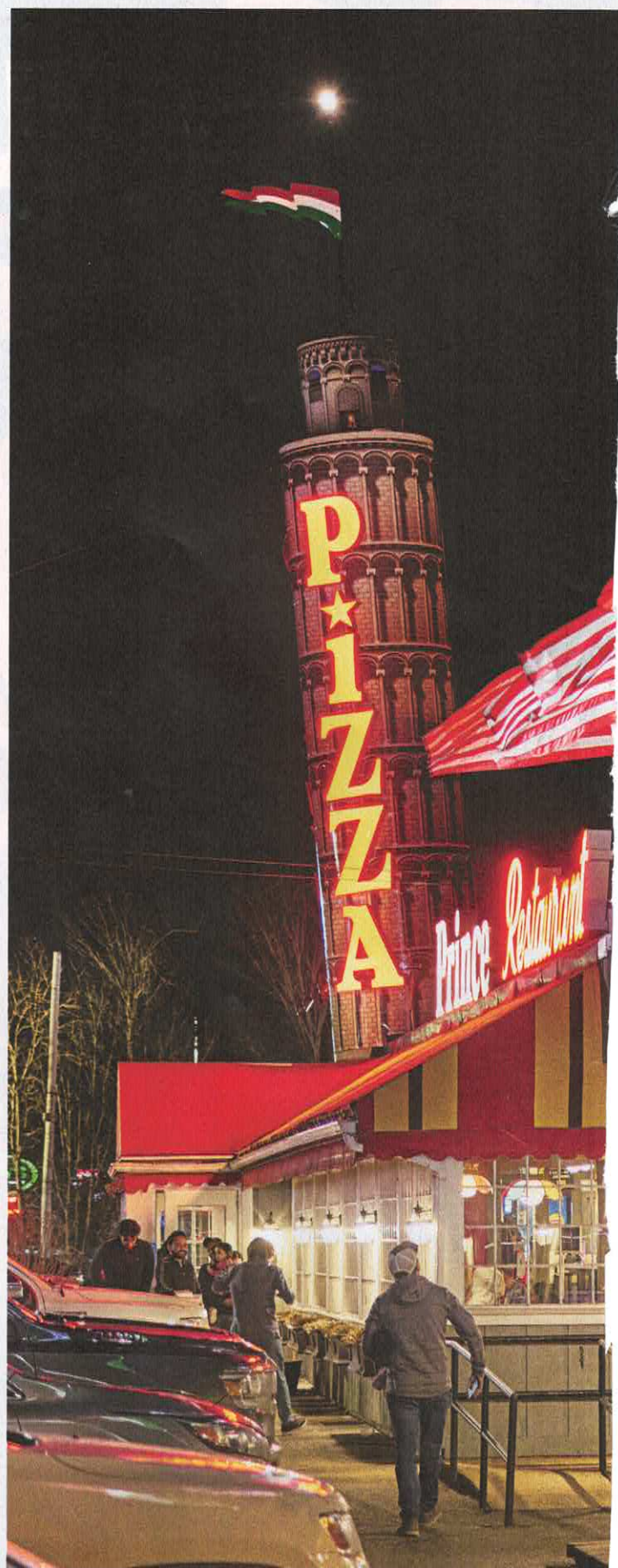
**KEN  
RICHARDSON**





**I'M LYING NAKED ON MY BACK** on a wet-towel-draped wooden bench. At around 200 degrees, the air is so hot I worry I might pass out. As tsunami-size waves of warm water cascade over me, I hold my breath and close my eyes tight (though I can still sense the gaze of others upon me). Every time the tide ebbs, I feel a big, bear-like man lashing my bare skin over and over with thick, heavy bushels of sopping-wet oak and birch leaves. ¶ *Where the hell am I, I ask myself between whaps and thwacks, and why am I here?* ¶ These are rhetorical questions. I know the literal answers: I'm getting a traditional *platza* treatment inside Dillon's

The Leaning Tower-capped Prince Pizzeria, formerly known as Prince Spaghetti House, is a Route 1 landmark.









Russian Steam Bath, a barebones, cement-walled sauna off U.S. Route 1 just north of Boston. And I've come here to help satisfy my obsession with the 17 neon-lit, motel-lined miles of the highway that are bookended by Chelsea and Danvers.

For years, whenever I've braved the endless stream of speeding souped-up cars on my way to-and-fro the North Shore along Route 1, I've found myself fascinated by the piercing stretch of road. It's part of one of America's first interstate highways, and with its gaudy themed restaurants, fleabag lodgings, topless bars, and assortment of other vaguely dated diversions, it still feels like a place out of time—especially when compared to Boston, just down the street. Once a working-class crazy quilt of a city, the Hub over the years has ironed out most of its weirder wrinkles and bleached its dirtier seams to become a more palatable place for white-collar types to live, work, and play. The city is cleaner and safer, for sure, but it's also lost a bit of the peculiar grit and whimsy that is, in my opinion, an important part of what makes urban living worth the rent.

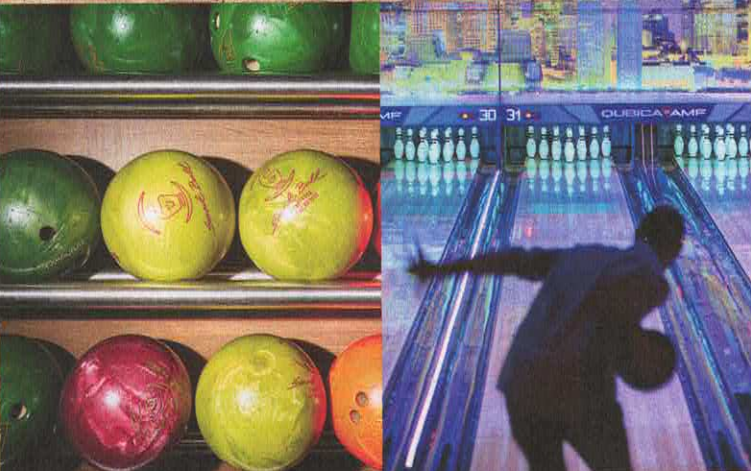
Just to the north, though, Route 1 remains the Masshole answer to Old Las Vegas—both amusingly ostentatious (there's a pizza place with its own scaled-for-suburbia replica of the Leaning Tower of Pisa) and coated with a thin layer of suburban-desert dust and grime. It is also littered with halcyon memories for absolutely everyone I've spoken to who grew up nearby and took it all in: from family dinners at the now-raised Hilltop Steakhouse, famed for its 68-foot-tall glowing cactus probably visible from space; to after-prom hangouts at the Kowloon, an over-the-top tiki-themed restaurant; to bachelor parties at the Golden Banana, where guests can see all-nude dancers at a bar located behind a gas station.

These and other local rites of passage can leave even the saltiest metro-Boston native feeling nostalgic these days. Between the isolating effects of the pandemic and simply getting older, many people are “starting to look back” at Route 1 with fondness and humor, says the 37-year-old hot-tub repairman and meme-maker behind the Instagram account @squareonemallgoth. Girard, who goes by his first name only and grew up in Everett, is constantly cranking out irreverent local-color-predicated jokes about nearby malls, restaurants, strip clubs, and more. It's telling that his niche north-of-the-city account has amassed 10,000 followers and counting. “Everyone remembers their friend's basement, or the party where they made out for

Clockwise from top left: members of the Kowloon's Wong family; outside the Everett sex shop Stardust Video; bowling at Town Line Luxury Lanes; steam-room regulars at Dillon's Russian Steam Bath; a pie from Prince Pizzeria; standup comedy at Giggles; Karl's, the best place for wurst.









the first time," he says. "But you can't revisit those places in the same way that you can revisit the Kowloon."

That's true, at least for now. Yet in recent years, Route 1's perseverance as a stable home for a wide range of quirky businesses—and as a semi-seedy grownup playground—has come under threat from corporate chains, high-end real estate developers, and crackdowns by town zoning boards. If you ask me, that means it's high time to paint Route 1 red and revel in its curious nooks and crannies before the rest of it falls victim to time.

From left: a guest in laced-up skates at Roller World, a retro rink in Saugus; a dancer wearing knee-high stiletto boots at the Golden Banana, a strip club in Peabody.

And so, on this particular afternoon, my reconnaissance has brought me to Dillon's. The oldest *banya* in America, it opened its doors for *schvitzing* in 1885. Inside, though, it feels more like Boston circa 1985; only a Larry Bird poster seems missing from the wall of beige lockers in the changing area directly beside the front desk, where a man with a sharp Slavic accent takes my name and hands me a towel and a key.

I deposit my clothes and join the regulars in their slow, ritualistic rotation between the dry sauna, steam room, gang shower, and lounge with a flat-screen TV and a stack of well-thumbed magazines. Matt Damon on the cover of *GQ* is the only dude who is dressed; everyone else struts around in the buff or meanders loosely draped. Although Mondays are reserved for women, this is otherwise a men-only space, something I'm surprised you can still get away with in





2022. (“There used to be YMCAs for this,” murmurs someone in the lounge who, sans shirt and pants, definitely looks like he could be a cop, a cowboy, or a construction worker.) Clearly, the fact that Dillon’s represents an endangered habitat is exactly why, over the course of a couple hours, I clock a slow but steady stream of blokes taking refuge from the miserable weather or perhaps their spouse to manspread unassailed, float around some pheromones, and generally partake in locker-room bullshitting with the boys.

“First-timer up at bat?” hoots a spectator back in the sauna, enjoying the very public show of my virgin *platza* massage. I holler something snarky in reply and get a chortle. Then, another deluge of water, walloping of leaves, and the sensation of strong paws rubbing a lather of olive oil and soap all over, and into, my skin. The finale is a cold shower: icy water dumped on my head out of a

bright-orange Home Depot bucket. I’m left exhausted and feeling ravaged, as though I had a spa day at a fight club. It feels great. “Tell your friends,” says my grizzled, towel-kilted masseur, whose torso is a billboard of Boston-sports-team tattoos. “But not too many. A lot of people wouldn’t understand.”

*Well, I think, as I head back to the locker room, I guess we’ll find out.*

**IT’S TIME TO GO** dinosaur hunting.

Dillon’s, squatting in Chelsea under the shadow of the Tobin Bridge, is the type of anachronistic curiosity that lives on the fringes of Route 1. The heart of the concrete jungle, though, has to be Saugus, home to the strip’s single most famous mascot: a bright, DayGlo-orange statue of a Tyrannosaurus rex. He/she/they doesn’t have a name, and doesn’t need one. Everyone *(Continued on page 128)*





# WHERE TO EAT & PLAY

Route 1 is more than just a place to buy a loveseat, repair your smartphone, and get a body wax, all without leaving the same parking lot. It's also a place to sit back and enjoy the finer things in life—with a touch of kitsch, naturally.



## LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Giggles

	SEE	HEAR	TASTE	SPEND
<b>GIGGLES COMEDY CLUB</b> Saugus	Wise-crackin' goodfellas like Frank Santorelli, a.k.a. Georgie the bartender from <i>The Sopranos</i> .	Politically incorrect zingers and miles-deep Boston accents.	Cheesy pies, red-sauce spaghetti, and more Italian-American eats from parent restaurant Prince Pizzeria.	About 30 bucks for a show ticket, plus whatever you <i>mangia</i> .
<b>KOWLOON RESTAURANT</b> Saugus	Weekly Wednesday bingo in the downstairs lounge and Friday standup in the upstairs "Komedey" club for starters.	Movie dialogue you can quote by heart ("Goonies never say die!") when outdoor screenings—and live bands, too—return to the parking lot this summer.	Pupu platters with beef teriyaki and, for dessert, giant chocolate-dipped fortune cookies covered in Heath Bar crunch.	It varies, but \$20 is usually enough for a comedy show or a carful of movie fans.
<b>MIXX360 NIGHTLIFE</b> Malden	Flashing lights filling packed dance floors, plus hooting Sox (and Bruins, and Celtics) fans in neighbor-sibling Luxury Boxx Sports Bar.	Bass-heavy EDM and hip-hop from guest DJs, as well as occasional live tunes. Don't miss: Who's Bad, America's Ultimate Michael Jackson Tribute, this month.	<i>Sriracha</i> -ketchup-accompanied cheesesteak rolls and other bar bites for soaking up rounds of espresso martinis.	There's no cover before 10 p.m. for most DJ-headlined dance parties.
<b>BREAKAWAY</b> Danvers	Live music in a boisterous bar/restaurant that doubles as a popular private-function facility.	Van Halen, Kiss, and AC/DC cover bands, plus original acts that lean heavy on hard rock and country.	Rib-sticking two-handers like a messy mac 'n' cheese-topped burger and Buffalo-style buttermilk chicken sandwich.	\$15 for a single ticket, or reserve a table for up to eight.

KEN RICHARDSON (GIGGLES COMEDY CLUB, KOWLOON RESTAURANT); MONA MIRI (ROAST BEEF); GETTY IMAGES (HILLTOP, SONIC); COURTESY PHOTO (WATER PARK OF NEW ENGLAND)

## A BRIEF TIMELINE

A not-so-ancient history of the strip.

### 1805

The Newburyport Turnpike opens as a direct route for horses and buggies to Boston; it's paved and renamed Route 1 in the early 1920s.

### 1930

A retired sea captain builds a boat-shaped restaurant on dry land, making the seafood-focused Ship one of the first audaciously themed eateries on the strip.



### 1958

Under the ownership of the Wong family, the Mandarin House restaurant is renamed Kowloon Restaurant and begins its expansion from a 50- to a 1,200-seat empire.

### 1969

After scoring his 21st goal of the season with the Boston Bruins, legend Bobby Orr celebrates his 21st birthday at Caruso's Diplomat, a swinging cocktail lounge and function hall.



## MUST-GET GRUB

### "SAUGUS WINGS" AT KOWLOON RESTAURANT.

The full secret recipe for the most popular dish at Route 1's sprawling shrine to festive Asian dining is kept under lock and key. Here's what we do know: They're deep-fried and wok-tossed with chopped garlic. More important, whatever is in the spicy, sticky sauce that ultimately lacquers these mouthwatering chicken wings, they inspire more hometown pride than boring old Boston baked beans ever could.

### STEAK TIPS AT THE NEWBRIDGE CAFÉ.

An inconspicuous brick box swathed in shades of brown, the good ol' NewBridge (est. 1975)—just a mile off the strip—doesn't have a colorful neon sign like the spots right on Route 1. What the local fave does have, though, are lusted-after steak tips: skewered and flame-kissed on the open grill, which leaves a hickey or two of char marks perfect for covering up with a just-so-sweet barbecue sauce (also sold by the bottle).

### "THREE WAY" SANDWICH AT KELLY'S ROAST BEEF.

If you want to see a fight break out, ask a Route 1 crowd to choose the best roast beef

sandwich shop. (People take this *seriously*.) Now that Kelly's is expanding to Florida, though, there's no question that its medium-rare slices of 25-day-aged beef knuckle—topped with the regional-classic trio of mayo, barbecue sauce, and white American cheese—will be the standard-bearer bringing the North Shore to the South.

### CHICKEN PIES AT HARROWS.

On busy days when nobody's cooking for the kids, the frozen chicken pot pies at family-owned Harrows—offered alongside its famous fresh ones with golden-flaky crusts—will feed up to six. Pro tip: Add an order of rolls, for swabbing up all the gravy-covered goodness.

### CINNABON FRENCH TOAST AT IRON TOWN DINER.

Hangovers are a hazard of a night on the town. Should one strike, coddle your bleary eyes, ringing ears, and rumbling stomach with a triple-decker of Texas-style French toast—frosting-glazed and doused in cinnamon and powdered sugar—at a terrific townie diner tucked right outside the hubbub of the main strip. Your brain, meanwhile, will take great comfort in the endless coffee. Bottoms up.

### THE SALAD BAR AT THE HARDCOVER.

Route 1 is a place powered by nostalgia for old-school American restaurants, and what's more old-school than a salad bar? Yeah, yeah—we know manhandling shared tongs feels oh-so-naughty nowadays, but there's something oddly comforting about assembling crunchy iceberg lettuce, crumbly croutons, and scoops of Thousand Island dressing with fellow family-night-outers at the Hardcover, where the salad bar comes with every entrée.



Water Park of New England

## OLD-SCHOOL FUN

### TOWN LINE LUXURY LANES, MALDEN

With plush booths, glow-in-the-dark "Atomic Bowling" nights, and bowls of boozy punch swimming with Swedish Fish, this bowling alley is a kingpin castle compared to most joints.

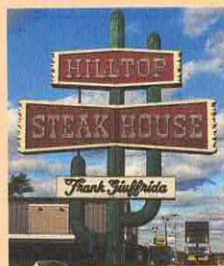
**ROLLER WORLD, SAUGUS**  
Eighties babies, take note: This classic rink renting quad and in-line skates designates Tuesday nights for adults only. That means throwback jams overhead and no little kids tripping up your moonwalks.

**SKULL CLIFF, LYNNFIELD**  
A half-mile hike down a dirt path behind a Route 1 Chrysler dealership leads to—surprise!—a 30-foot-tall

quarry wall covered in colorful skeletons left by graffiti artist Ichabod in 2001.

**IN THE GAME, PEABODY**  
Up for a challenge? Hit the climbing wall or three-story-tall ropes course at this all-ages play palace off the strip. Bonus points for laser tag, weekly karaoke nights, and cotton-candy-topped martinis.

**WATER PARK OF NEW ENGLAND, DANVERS**  
Twisty pool slides and an indoor river will tucker out the kiddos for the ride home at this year-round splash pad. If the hot tub puts the grownups into nap mode, too, "Splash N Stay" packages at the neighboring hotel await.



## 1989

The Hilltop Steakhouse rakes in \$60 million, the high watermark of a period in which it is widely considered the highest-grossing restaurant in the country, and perhaps the world.

## 1999

America's then-hottest couple, Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake, tear up the dance floor at the massive Palace nightclub complex, which went "Bye Bye Bye" in 2004.



## 2009

Hungry night owls rejoice when New England's first Sonic drive-through restaurant opens in Peabody, serving fast-food burgers and shakes, plus retro carhop service, till 2 a.m.

## 2015

In an early casualty of still-ongoing redevelopment on Route 1, a wrecking ball arrives for Weylu's, a colossal and infamously decadent Chinese restaurant that took three years to build in the '80s.