

{local flavor}

# THROW YOURSELF A FEAST

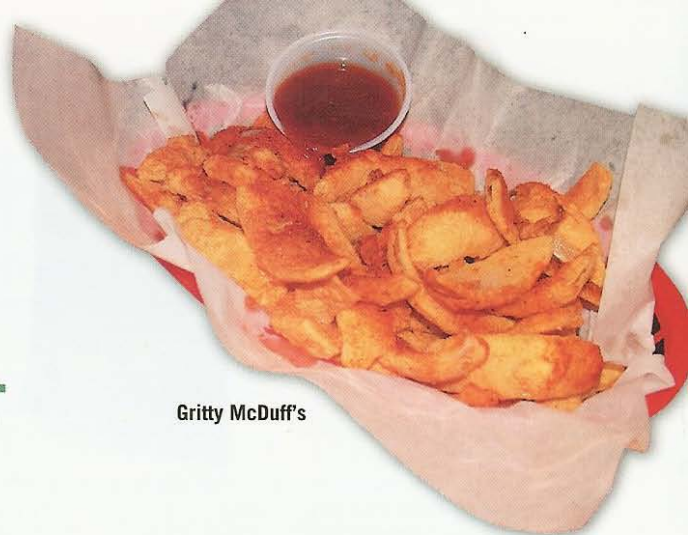
by Deirdre Fulton

Whether we're marking the start of Spring Training, the pending birth of a baby, or the buds newly blooming on the trees, spring seems to be a time for celebration. As we thaw out, we recommit to our social lives, coming out of hibernation for big-group gatherings full of laughter, chatter, and good food. Several spots in Portland lend themselves to such social get-togethers, providing tasty, sizable munchies along with great ambiance and freely flowing drinks (hey, we all need some lubricant to get things going after a solitary winter).

One such establishment, especially suitable for baseball maniacs and those who love them, is **The Stadium** (504 Congress Street). Portland's biggest sports bar lends itself to larger parties, with lots of space and loads of easily

pushed-together tables. Plus, the arcade games (including *Buckhunter*, pinball, and pool), and looming TVs offer less-gregarious types a diversion and respite from the madd(en)ing crowd. The classic pub-grub here is ideal for sharing — wings come in orders of six; nachos arrive piled high, wide, and doused in cheese; and the servings of French fries and onion rings are generous. Or get a little bit of everything with the Tailgater, which serves three to four people (\$34.99). There's a prescient sandwich on the list, as well — the Hangover (\$9.50) — that combines chicken tenders and mozzarella sticks on a bun. Perhaps if you order it the night before, you'll avoid the fate it exists to combat.

A group-friendly place with a decidedly different aesthetic is



Gritty McDuff's

**Gritty McDuff's** at 396 Fore Street. The first of Gritty's three brewpub locations (the others are in Freeport and Lewiston) has long beer-hall-esque tables that are perfect for rollicking, rowdy conversations. Also helpful on that front are the Original Pub Style Ale and the Black Fly Stout, two favorites that are brewed in-house, and occasionally cask-conditioned (and some say more flavorful). Gritty's serves up pretty standard bar food — nachos, skins, and the Spicy Onion Petals (\$5.99), served with a Black Fly Stout BBQ sauce. All of it is good for sharing and passing down a line of friends.

Once the weather gets warmer, the 1000-square-foot deck at the **Novare Res Bier Cafe** (4 Canal Plaza; enter through the alleyway

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