

The Buzz

TABLE HOPPING

Best seat in the house may be wherever these folks sit

An occasional look at the top tables in local restaurants.

It didn't take long for Meridian Restaurant & Bar to attract a power crowd. The eatery at 5694 N. Meridian St. had too many things going for it to fall by the wayside — despite the economy.

Open just over a year, Meridian sits on some of the city's most prominent real estate in Meridian-Kessler. From one vantage point, the restaurant looks out onto Alice Carter Park.

The building used to be home to Dodd's Town House, which closed in 2006. Meridian's developers blended the old and new in a number of appealing ways.



JAMES YEE / The Star

They decided they could nudge the two-story log building constructed in the late 1800s into the 21st century without losing its old-time charm.

They also wooed and won over the Meridian Street Preservation folks, nabbed well-known chef **Dan Dunville** to create the menu and serve as general manager, added a cocktail lounge, an outdoor patio and threw in free valet parking before opening to all-around acclaim in November 2007.

The bar area is available for folks just stopping by for a drink, dessert or dinner. When **David Letterman** was in town for the Indy 500 last May, he reserved tables in this area so the team could eat together.

Since you need to walk past the bar to see who is at Tables 202-206, it can be a great place to hide, if that's your inclination. And no one hides better than Letterman during his visits back home to Indiana.

Dunville said one of the most popular tables is 52, which sits in

a corner along the Meridian Street side. That's where Indianapolis Colts quarterback **Peyton Manning** ate during his visit. It's also where former deputy mayor **Melina Kennedy**, who is now a partner at Baker & Daniels, dined during the presidential primary last spring with two-time Academy Award winner **Jessica Lange** and the Obama campaign's national chief operating officer, **Betsy Myers**. Kennedy dines there frequently with her husband, Olympic runner/businessman **Bob Kennedy**.

Another popular spot in the main dining room is right in front of the fireplace, making Tables 42 and 43 hot, hot, hot.

The staff seated former Indianapolis Mayor **Bart Peterson** and Indianapolis Airport Authority chairman **Randall Tobias** at Table 43 during their individual visits. **Mike Dunleavy** (the Pacers forward) dined at Table 42.

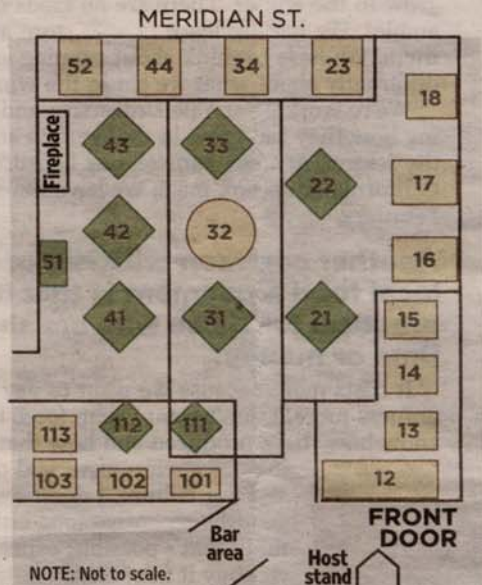
Tables 101 and 102, banquettes that back up against the wall on the left as you walk into the dining room, serve another purpose: seating slightly larger parties someplace other than the middle of the room.

Table 102 is favored by Gov. **Mitch Daniels**, whose security detail prefers keeping him safe. **Sarah Lechleiter**, wife of Eli Lilly and Co. CEO **John C. Lechleiter**, sat at Table 101 for lunch with friends a few weeks ago. And Eli Lilly exec **Alecia DeCoudreaux**, who lives near the restaurant, has also been seated in that area.

The restaurant has a private dining room on the second floor, and Indianapolis Colts coach **Tony Dungy** has reserved that space in the



Susan Guyett's
TALK OF OUR TO



Manning
Table 52



Kennedy
Table 52



Tobias
Table 43



Daniels
Table 102



Letterman
Bar area



Dunleavy
Table 42



Smulyan
Table 112,
outdoors

past, according to Dunville.

Meridian also has an urbane outdoor dining area that guests can enjoy in better weather. That's where Emmis CEO **Jeff Smulyan** and **Michael Twyman**, director of grants programs in Indiana for the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, have been spotted during different visits. Smulyan has also dined at Table 112.

Meridian Restaurant & Bar is open for Sunday brunch and for lunch and dinner Monday through Saturday. Check out the menu at www.meridianonmeridian.com, or call (317) 466-1111.