

CELEBRATE *Magazine* RATE[®]

CELEBRATING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT OF ARKANSAS

Beautiful Spaces:

A few modern twists
breathe new life into
Fayetteville's Fulbright
Building

Vendor Spotlight:

The largest kids
entertainment network
is following Wal-Mart's
example to be more
environmentally friendly



“PLAY BALL!”

Excitement builds around

Opening Day

for the inaugural season of the

Northwest Arkansas Naturals

AA affiliate of the **Kansas City Royals**



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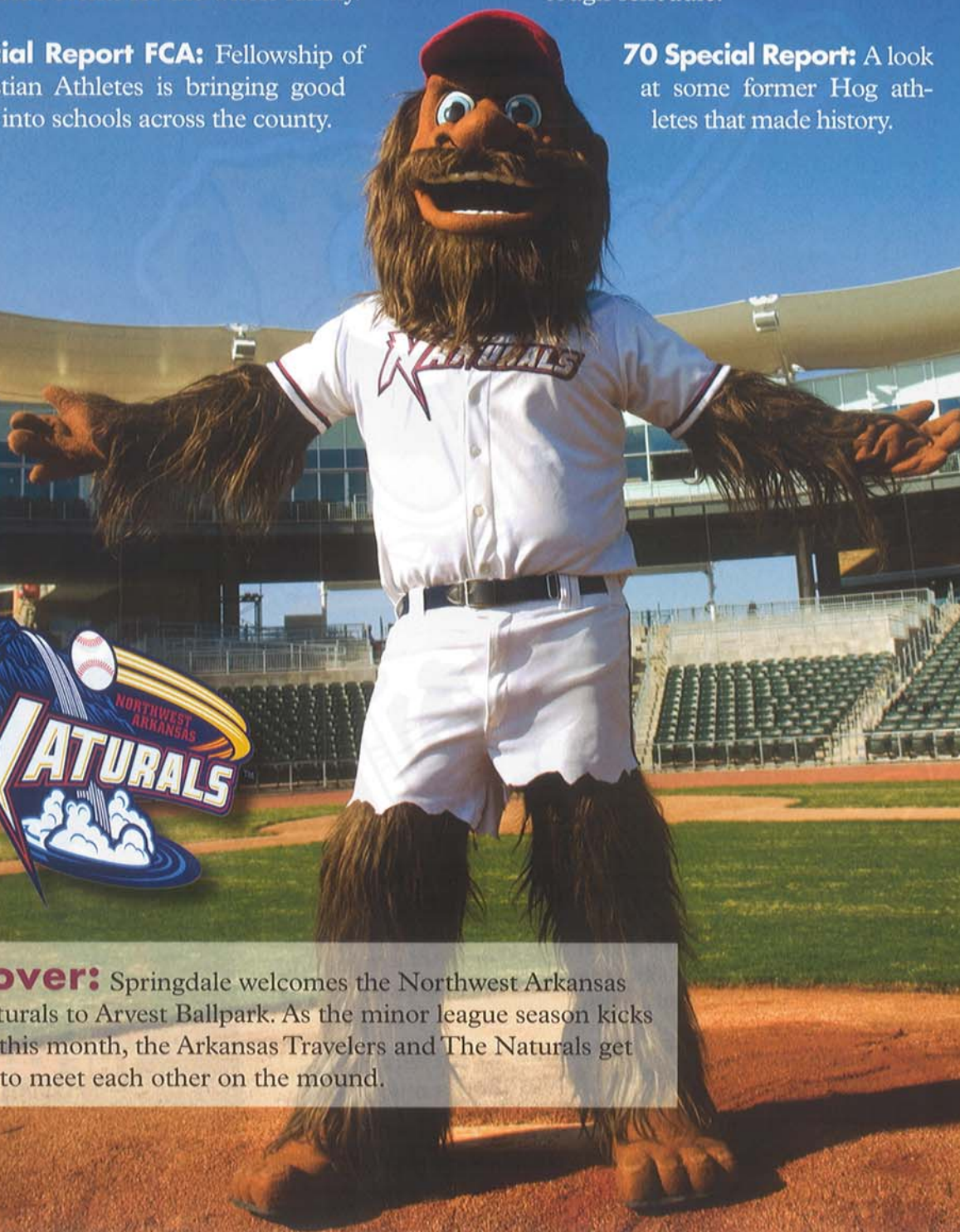
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CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



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MICKEY RAPIER

EACH WEEK MICKEY RAPIER OFFERS SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE FROM THE PULPIT OF FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH TO THE RESIDENTS OF NORTHWEST ARKANSAS. WE ARE THRILLED TO HAVE HIM PROVIDE CELEBRATE ARKANSAS READERS WITH INSPIRATION AND MOTIVATION IN HIS MONTHLY COLUMNS.

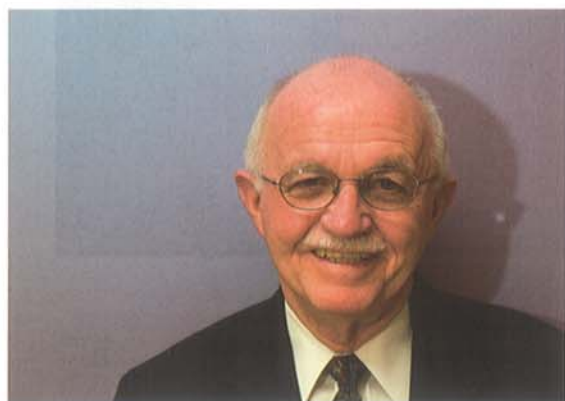


DON LOWE

DON LOWE GIVES US AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT WHAT'S HAPPENING INSIDE THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS' ATHLETIC TEAMS AND THE INDIVIDUAL ATHLETES THAT MAKE THOSE TEAMS SO SPECIAL. LOOK TO THE RAZORBACK REPORT TO SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE HILL.

PAMM PREBIL

PAMM PREBIL SHARES LIFE EXPERIENCES IN EACH MONTH'S 'OUTSIDE LOOKING IN' COLUMN. LOOK TO PAMM FOR A POSITIVE WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND A GOOD LAUGH.

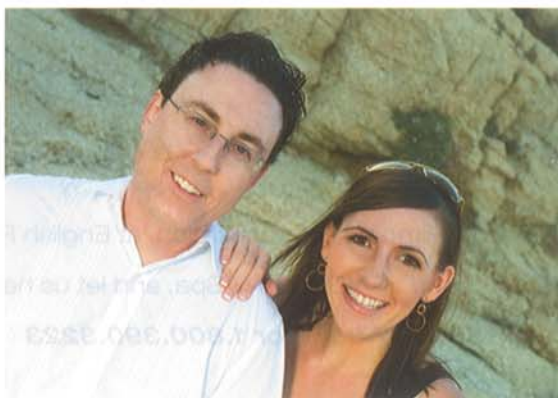


DICK TRAMMEL

DICK TRAMMEL IS EVERYWHERE, INCLUDING CELEBRATE ARKANSAS MAGAZINE! EACH MONTH'S 'HIDDEN TREASURES' COLUMN HIGHLIGHTS A NEW ARKANSAS TREASURE HANDPICKED BY THIS PHILANTHROPIST AND BUSINESS LEADER.

JASON AND KORI HUDSON

JASON STARTED HUDSON PHOTOGRAPHY IN 1997 AND SINCE HAS BEEN NAMED TO THE 'TOP TWENTY WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHERS IN THE WORLD' LIST BY THE WEDDING PHOTOJOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION, AND TO THE 'TOP 50 PHOTOGRAPHERS IN THE UNITED STATES' BY PHOTO DISTRICT NEWS MAGAZINE. KORI STARTED SHOOTING IN COLLEGE WHILE STUDYING JOURNALISM, SHE SERVED AS THE BRIDAL EDITOR FOR THE ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE FROM 2004-2006 AND JOINED THE CELEBRATE ARKANSAS MAGAZINE STAFF IN 2006. SHE ALSO JOINED JASON AT HUDSON PHOTOGRAPHY IN 2006 AND HAS SINCE BEEN RANKED AS THE #1 PHOTOGRAPHER IN ARKANSAS BY THE WEDDING PHOTOJOURNALIST ASSOCIATION. TOGETHER JASON AND KORI LIVE IN FAYETTEVILLE WITH THEIR THREE CHILDREN.



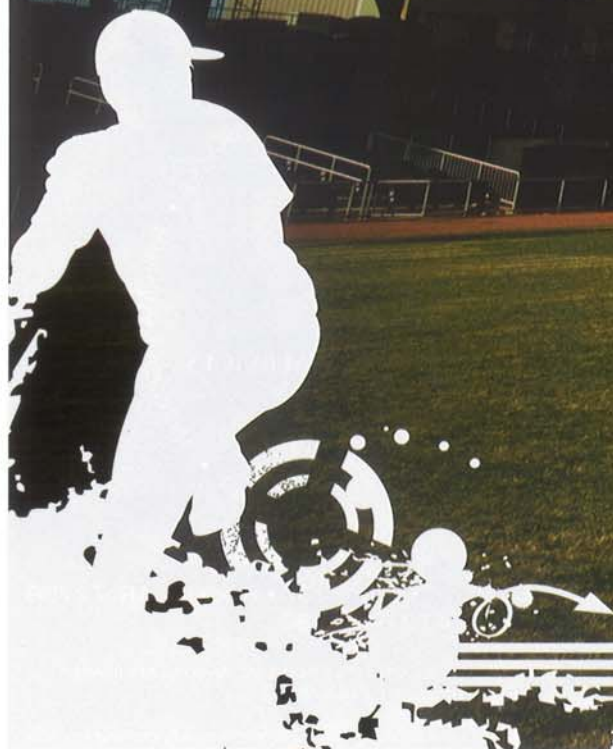
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“PLAY BALL”

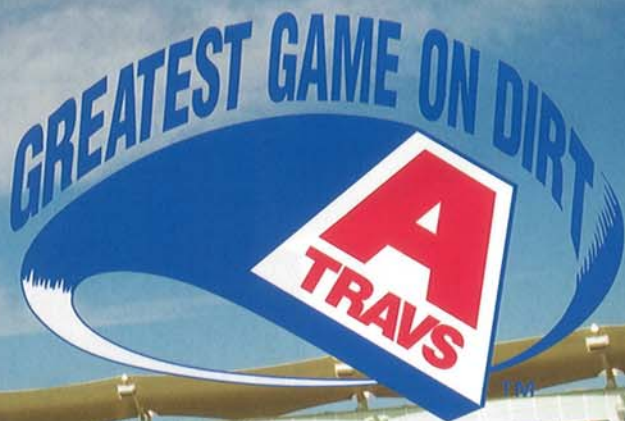
SPRINGDALE HIT’S A HOMERUN

BY ERIC KARLAN

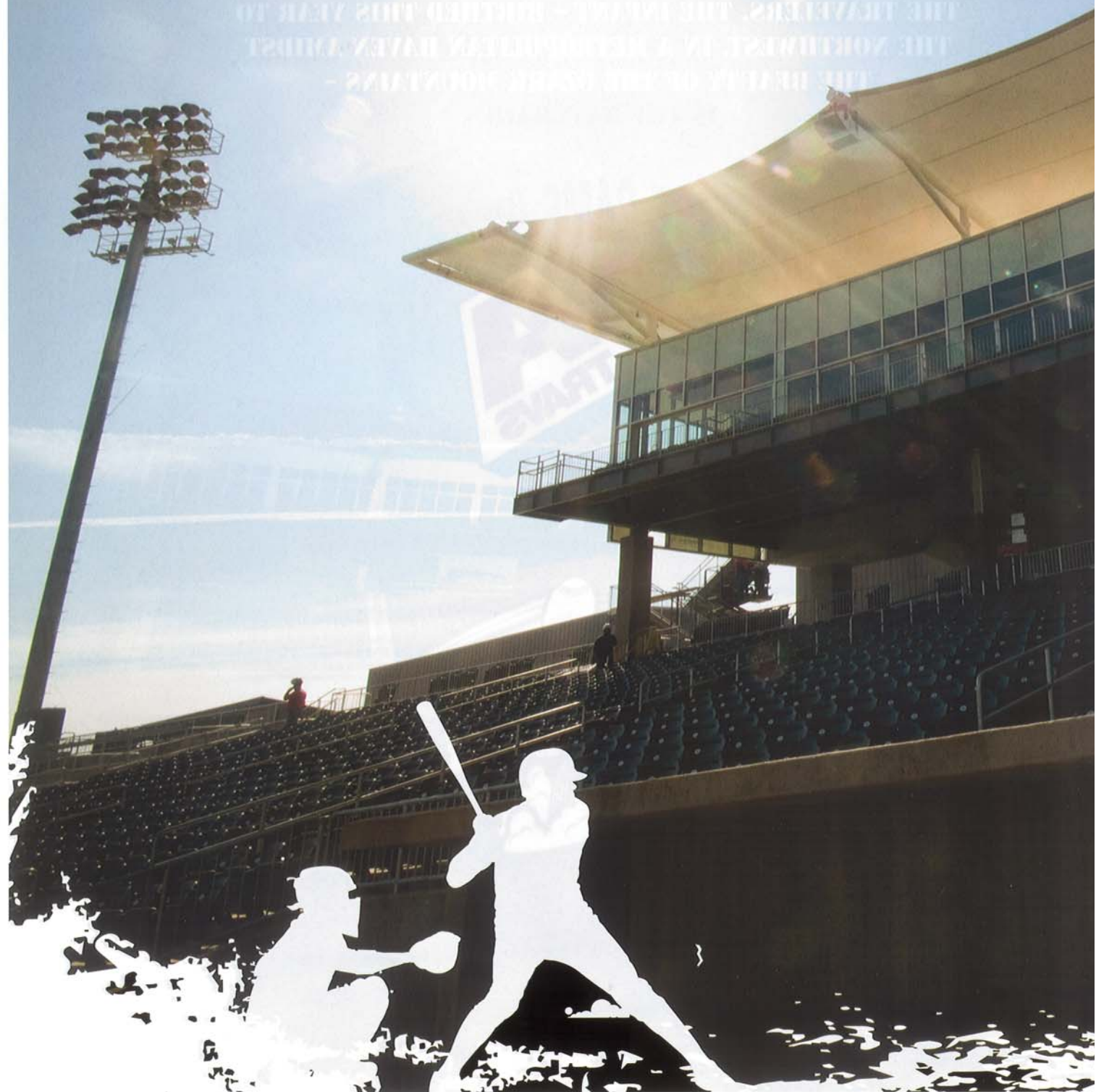
PHOTOS BY JASON HUDSON OF HUDSON PHOTOGRAPHY



ON APRIL 3RD, A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS FOR ARKANSAS PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL. OVER ONE HUNDRED YEARS IN THE MAKING, THE STORY WILL TELL A CLASSIC TALE OF OLD VERSUS NEW. THE INSTITUTION - THE HEART OF ARKANSAS BASEBALL SINCE 1895, PLAYING IN THE GEOGRAPHIC AND GOVERNMENTAL HEART OF THE STATE - IS THE TRAVELERS. THE INFANT - BIRTHED THIS YEAR TO THE NORTHWEST, IN A METROPOLITAN HAVEN AMIDST THE BEAUTY OF THE OZARK MOUNTAINS - IS THE NATURALS.



**“PEOPLE CAME FROM
FIFTY, SIXTY MILES OUT
ON THE WEEKENDS TO
WATCH BASEBALL.”
- BILL VALENTINE**



The Arkansas Travelers and Northwest Arkansas Naturals share one fundamental similarity, aside from playing America's pastime in the Union's twenty-fifth state: both teams compete in the class double-A Texas League North Division – two steps away from the major leagues. Beyond that, the two organizations, separated by more than a century of history, have little in common.

The Travelers are as much a part of Arkansas history as the legend that inspired the team nickname. Many years ago, before the advent of the designated hitter, or the installation of lights for night contests, let alone organized baseball leagues, a future Confederate colonel named Sandy Faulkner told the tale of The Arkansas Traveler.

As folklore has it, a traveler riding by horse, while venturing through the Ozark forests in the early nineteenth century, lost his way as dusk darkened to night. By good fortune, the traveler stumbled upon a squatter, consumed with playing his fiddle outside a shoddy shack. Despite his urgent situation, the traveler was rebuffed, as the squatter continued to obsess over the same verse of the same song over and over again, unsure of the lyrics that followed.

Oh once upon a time in Arkansas

An old man sat in his little cabin door,

And fiddled at a tune that he liked to hear,

A jolly old tune that he played by ear.

Frustrated by the lack of hospitality, and fed up with listening to the same verse stuck on repeat, the traveler hopped off his steed, tucked the fiddle under his chin, and to the delight of the squatter, played the tune in full. Delighted by the stranger's assistance, the squatter offered food and shelter for the evening.

Faulkner's legend of The Arkansas Traveler carried through the coming generations, manifesting itself in Arkansas culture in a variety of facets. The song of the story, titled "The Arkansas Traveler," became the state

song in 1949 for a short time; it is now the state historical song. The Colonel's story has also provided the namesake for a theatrical production, a painting, the University of Arkansas student newspaper, and an honor bestowed by the governor on any "ambassador of the beauties and people of Arkansas."

Perhaps the most celebrated and eminent tribute to Faulkner's folklore, however, is the baseball club in Little Rock.

In 1895, minor league baseball arrived in the Arkansas capital. Playing its home games at the Baseball Grounds at the intersection of High and 12th Streets, the squad struggled in the eight-team Southern League. Ceasing play midseason – a common occurrence in early baseball – with a 25–47 record, the 'Little Rock Eighteen' foreshadowed a tough future in the standings.

Despite a dismal debut and subsequent six-season hiatus from baseball, the Little Rock Travelers had, unwittingly, established the foundation for one of the richest traditions in all of professional sports. Purist sports fans long for more Travelers – a team that has endured seasons in three centuries without moving, with one nickname. In Minor League Baseball, only the Buffalo Bisons have a longer unblemished streak.

Hiccups in the Travelers timeline were infrequent. Following the 1909 season, eight years after returning to the new Southern Association, Little Rock was forced to package and ship its equipment and players to Chattanooga for the whopping cost of \$12,000. In 1915, the revived Travelers began an era of consistency – consistent look, and with rare exceptions, consistent losing. Still, fans flocked from across the state.

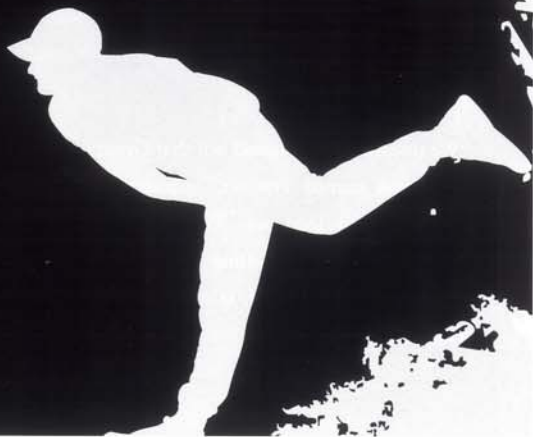
"Back in the 1930s, major league sports did not exist west of the Mississippi River," remembers longtime employee and current general manager, Bill Valentine. "Local teams from Arkansas on out to the west were the teams. You had radio, but they didn't broadcast the [Saint Louis]

Cardinals or Travelers yet. People came from fifty, sixty miles out on the weekends to watch baseball."

With the advents of television and air conditioning during the 1950s, minor league attendance dwindled steadily. In a last ditch effort to jumpstart ticket sales, the Travelers claimed the entire state of Arkansas in 1957. Breaking a longstanding tradition, management changed the name from the Little Rock Travelers to the Arkansas Travelers – the first time in the history of American professional sports that a team identified itself with not just its home city, but an entire state. The expansion of the Minnesota Twins and California Angels mimicked the practice at a major league level just a few years later.

By the following season, it became evident that the naming ploy would not save the franchise. Succumbing to widespread disinterest, the owners sold the team to Shreveport, Louisiana. Like a tormented ex after a regretted breakup, Arkansas did not realize how much it loved the Travelers until they were gone. Determined to bring baseball back for the 1960 season, Ray Winder, a long time Travs executive, devised a money raising strategy, buying stock in the Travs for five dollars a share, garnering the necessary \$70,000 to reenter the Southern Association. Across the country, struggling minor league cities employed the stock system to save their hometown clubs. Once again, Arkansas had created a model for others to follow.

After assembling a group of spring training rejects, the Travs were born again



— but not for long. While Arkansas had saved its team, the Southern Association could not save itself, folding after the 1961 season.

With no league in which to play during the 1962 season, the Travs joined two triple-A leagues in from 1963 through 1965 as a Philadelphia Phillies farm club, then settled for good in the Texas League in 1966 as a Cardinals farm team. The relationship lasted until the turn of the millennia — one of the longest partnerships ever — when the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim took over the reins of the parent club in 2001.

As baseball prospered across the country in the expansion era of the late sixties and seventies, Arkansas revamped its image — none more noteworthy than the addition of a marketing motto to the team logo. When Bill Valentine assumed general manager status in 1976, he coined the phrase “Greatest Show on Dirt” soon after.

“Sunday baseball had gone down the drain and we quit playing on Sundays so we played a double header on Saturdays,” says Valentine. “In between the doubleheader we’d take a half hour and have entertainment. We’d bring Captain Dynamite who blew himself up with four sticks of dynamite, Frisbee catching dogs, that type of thing.

“Then Ringling Brothers came to town one day, saw my ad in the amusement page and threatened to sue me. So we compromised on the ‘Greatest Game on Dirt.’”

The revised slogan was not stitched onto the players’ caps until the late eighties — some time after the Saturday doubleheader tradition disappeared — when Arkansas shed its traditional, simplistic ‘A’ emblem for more elaborate designs. The red crowned hat paid tribute to Travs history: “Greatest Game on Dirt” was printed in blue above a sweeping white trapezoid with “A Travs” written in red inside. The navy crowned hat paid tribute to American history.

“We researched and found out that General Lee’s horse was named ‘Traveler,’” explains Valentine. “The original logo was General Lee in the Confederate uniform sitting on a horse with a baseball bat in his hand, raised in the hand like a sword.”



**“GREATEST GAME
ON DIRT”**

Logo licensing rejected the idea, seeing only controversy in the cartoon depiction of the Civil War icon. Management replaced the bat-brandishing general with a bat-wielding baseball player, riding the same toothy grinned horse. The Travs batting practice cap, however, still retains the original illustration.

In 1997, General Lee's horse came to life. Unlike the galloping Traveler on the team hat, Shelly trots around the ballpark standing on hind legs. Incidentally, the name Shelly bears no historical significance. As a private organization, the Travs sought a corporate sponsor for the first mascot in team history. After management refueled and cut a deal at the local Shell gas station, the bushy haired, floppy eared, bucktoothed horse earned the name Shelly.

While Shelly continues to entertain fans at the recently constructed Dickey-Stephens Park, the horse has since been removed from the Travelers insignia. The interlocking 'L' and 'R' of the Travelers early years, sold for a time in the souvenir shop as a promotional retro cap, once again became the official team logo. When the Travs forded the Arkansas River, moving from downtown Little Rock to North Little Rock in 2007, the word 'North' was added in small script. Despite the classic 'LR' logo revival, the team still identifies with the whole state of Arkansas.

And until this April, the Travelers claim to the entire state was literal. Since 1955, when the El Dorado Oilers and Hot Springs Bathes folded with the Class C Cotton States League, the "Greatest Game on Dirt" monopolized Arkansas baseball. Independent league clubs play every summer, but only the Travelers tout professional status.

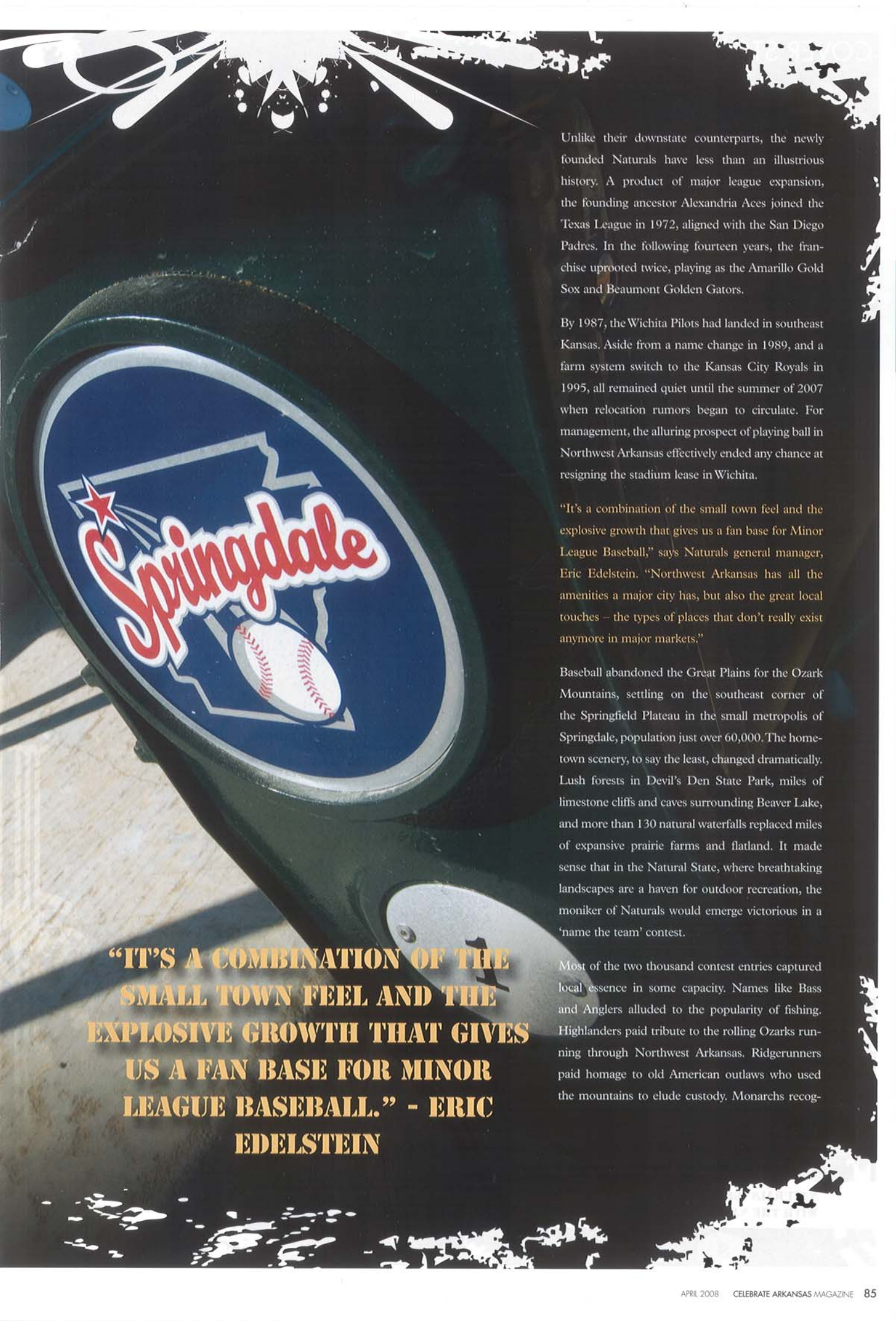
Then, last summer, the Wichita Wranglers announced their plans to head southeast at season's end. Their destination: Springdale, Arkansas. The Natural State had a natural rivalry.

"THE ADDITION OF THE NATURALS TO ARKANSAS IS A REAL COUP. DOUBLE-A TEAMS ARE REALLY DIFFICULT TO GET, ESPECIALLY IN THE TEXAS LEAGUE" - DAVID GLASS

Former Wal-Mart President and Chief Executive Officer, David Glass, praised the move: "The addition of the Naturals to Arkansas is a real coup. Double-A teams are really difficult to get, especially in the Texas League – the premier double-A league in the country where most of the best prospects play."

The new ball club in Springdale is "extra special" to the local Glass, who is also the current Owner and Chief Executive Officer of the Naturals parent team, the Kansas City Royals:

"Fifteen years ago, we discussed attracting a baseball team to Northwest Arkansas. At the time, the population would only support a single-A team, and there were no other single-A teams in the area. So we just forgot about the idea. Now the area has grown so much that we can not only support Single A but Double A. The opportunity came and we jumped at it."



**"IT'S A COMBINATION OF THE
SMALL TOWN FEEL AND THE
EXPLOSIVE GROWTH THAT GIVES
US A FAN BASE FOR MINOR
LEAGUE BASEBALL." - ERIC
EDELSTEIN**

Unlike their downstate counterparts, the newly founded Naturals have less than an illustrious history. A product of major league expansion, the founding ancestor Alexandria Aces joined the Texas League in 1972, aligned with the San Diego Padres. In the following fourteen years, the franchise uprooted twice, playing as the Amarillo Gold Sox and Beaumont Golden Gators.

By 1987, the Wichita Pilots had landed in southeast Kansas. Aside from a name change in 1989, and a farm system switch to the Kansas City Royals in 1995, all remained quiet until the summer of 2007 when relocation rumors began to circulate. For management, the alluring prospect of playing ball in Northwest Arkansas effectively ended any chance at resigning the stadium lease in Wichita.

"It's a combination of the small town feel and the explosive growth that gives us a fan base for Minor League Baseball," says Naturals general manager, Eric Edelstein. "Northwest Arkansas has all the amenities a major city has, but also the great local touches – the types of places that don't really exist anymore in major markets."

Baseball abandoned the Great Plains for the Ozark Mountains, settling on the southeast corner of the Springfield Plateau in the small metropolis of Springdale, population just over 60,000. The hometown scenery, to say the least, changed dramatically. Lush forests in Devil's Den State Park, miles of limestone cliffs and caves surrounding Beaver Lake, and more than 130 natural waterfalls replaced miles of expansive prairie farms and flatland. It made sense that in the Natural State, where breathtaking landscapes are a haven for outdoor recreation, the moniker of Naturals would emerge victorious in a 'name the team' contest.

Most of the two thousand contest entries captured local essence in some capacity. Names like Bass and Anglers alluded to the popularity of fishing. Highlanders paid tribute to the rolling Ozarks running through Northwest Arkansas. Ridgerunners paid homage to old American outlaws who used the mountains to elude custody. Monarchs recog-

COVER STORY

nized the team's affiliation with the Royals. Thunder Chickens linked Springdale baseball to the city's title of "Chicken Capital of the World," thanks to its having Tyson Chicken headquarters there.

Hands down the quirkiest nickname – in the same league as Lugnuts or Biscuits – Thunder Chickens gave Naturals the strongest challenge. Internet message boards raved over the hilarious proposal, campaigning strongly for its selection. Even after it finished runner-up, Thunder Chickens still came into serious consideration for a team mascot. Against more humorous judgment, management resisted. "We wanted to stay

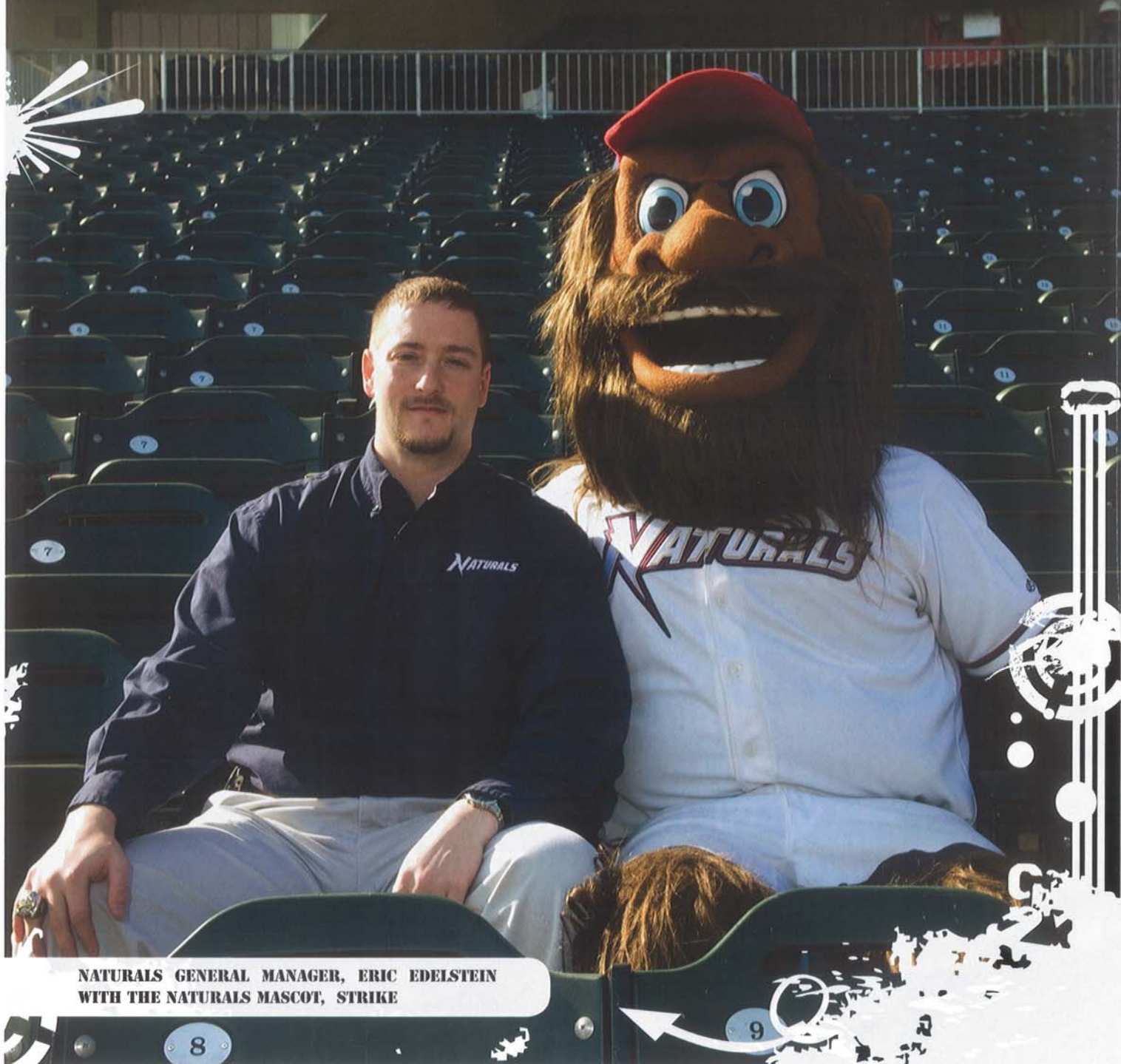
relevant to the greater community and not affiliate ourselves with one industry," says Edelstein.

Relevant to that point, Edelstein explains that, while Arvest Ballpark sits within Springdale city limits, the Naturals would belong to the community as a whole – all of Northwest Arkansas.

"The strength of all the surrounding communities is what brought us here. We wanted to make certain that we united the region as a whole and blew up those traditional parochial borders, no matter what city their home address sits in."

With a nickname in place, the commissioned Phoenix Design Works set about designing the Naturals logo. Colorful and intricate, the final design incorporated an array of related themes. In the background, a cascading waterfall tumbles over turquoise stone into rippling pool – a seemingly three-dimensional cloud rising from the silent crash depicted. A baseball whooshes over the landscape from the right, leaving a gold streak trailing behind. Scripted in small red text below are the words "Northwest Arkansas."

Striking through this scene is the Naturals nickname, written in large, bold white text, bordered in blue and red. The 'N' sticks out



**NATURALS GENERAL MANAGER, ERIC EDELSTEIN
WITH THE NATURALS MASCOT, STRIKE**

COVER STORY

prominently, a lightning bolt forming the diagonal between the capital letter's parallel verticals. The lightning's connection to Naturals is inadvertently twofold: not only does it relate to nature, but also – pure coincidence, according to management – the 1952 baseball book by Bernard Malamud, *The Natural*.

In the story, Roy Hobbs (portrayed by Robert Redford in the 1984 movie adaptation) forges a bat from the splintered wood of a tree struck by lightning, the same tree his father died under some years before. Throughout his ensuing career, Hobbs dazzles with his homemade bat, which he has burned into the name 'Wonderboy' next to a lightning bolt. The lightning 'N' serves as the primary logo on the Naturals on-field hats, worn by players, coaches, fans, and the team's mascot, Strike. Standing just shy of seven feet, weighing in at an intimidating 250 pounds, Strike stands out in a crowd. An apelike figure, covered from oversized head to giant feet in shaggy brown hair, many have likened him to a sort of Sasquatch figure. The Naturals organization, however, has claimed Strike is the Ozark Howler of local folklore, long believed to lurk in the nearby mountain brush.

"That's part of the fun of bringing folklore into baseball and pop culture," says Edelstein. "We can bring stories of the past into popular culture, and teach people who are new to the area in a fun and different way."

While Strike's open mouth and scrunched up nose may look angry, fans will quickly realize that is just a gaping guffaw, as the Howler loves having fun almost as much as rooting for his favorite baseball team. He will undoubtedly be there on April 10 for the Naturals home opener, along with 7,500 human fans filling Arvest Ballpark's stands, luxury boxes, and outfield picnic areas to capacity.

In the meantime, perhaps the date circled most in the pocket schedules of baseball fans across the Natural State is April 17, when the Travelers host their upstart, upstate rivals in North Little Rock for the first of a four-game set. Regional boundaries will be drawn; sides will be taken. Longtime Travs fans stranded in the northern territories may convert to a new set of colors. The undecided fan base may look to leadership for guidance. For now, however, Governor Mike Beebe, is staying bi-partisan. He is just pleased live professional baseball will be readily available to more of his fellow citizens.

"The addition of Minor League Baseball to Northwest Arkansas will allow another part of our state to experience the joy of America's pastime." ...

