

KENTUCKY

Alumni

Fall 2005

Alan Stein: One Man's Vision



UK

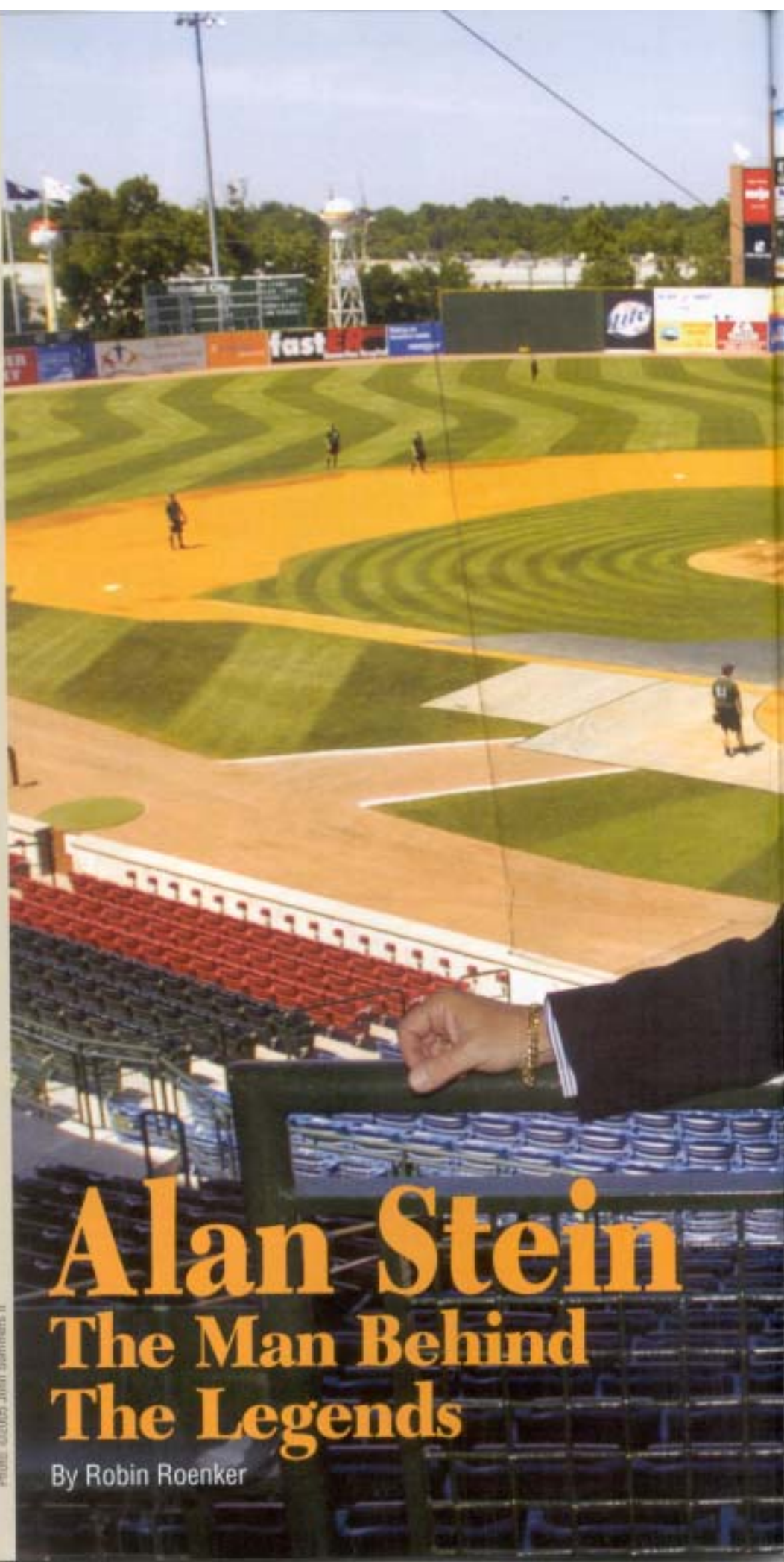
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY
Alumni Association

It was the fifth inning of a rare Lexington Legends day-game last spring. Inside Applebee's Park, a pack of teenage boys tried their hands at a pitching cage, toddlers and their parents took spins on the carousel, and a little boy and his sister fed one another heaps of purple cotton candy — all while the home team led the Asheville Tourists 4-2. By all accounts, a perfect day at the ballpark. And Alan Stein was where, if you know anything about the man, you might expect him to be: at the park's front gates, greeting fans.

After a few handshakes and smiles he was at work again, pointing out a puddle that needed attention to one of his staff while he made his way back to the game perhaps, or, more likely, to his office — just inside the stadium — where he fields calls from around the country with one question in common: How'd you do that?

The question keeps coming because Alan Stein's accomplishments as president and CEO of the Lexington Legends are a series of impossibilities. Or, what folks said was impossible but Stein didn't seem to notice. When it became clear in 1999 that the city of Lexington would not help fund construction of a baseball stadium, Stein and his business partners found a way to build the 6,000-seat ballpark — at a cost of \$13.5 million — entirely through private funding, the first time that had been done in minor league baseball history. Then, when the Legends took to the field in 2001, they capped off their inaugural season with a South Atlantic League Championship, a history-maker for two reasons: no minor league team had ever won a championship in its first year, while winning more games than all other teams, before Stein's Legends.

And in January, when ownership of the Legends was transferred to Stein's new company, Ivy Walls Management LLC, which he heads with business partner Bill Shea, Jr., of Pennsylvania, the selling price was rumored to be between \$25 - 30 million dollars.

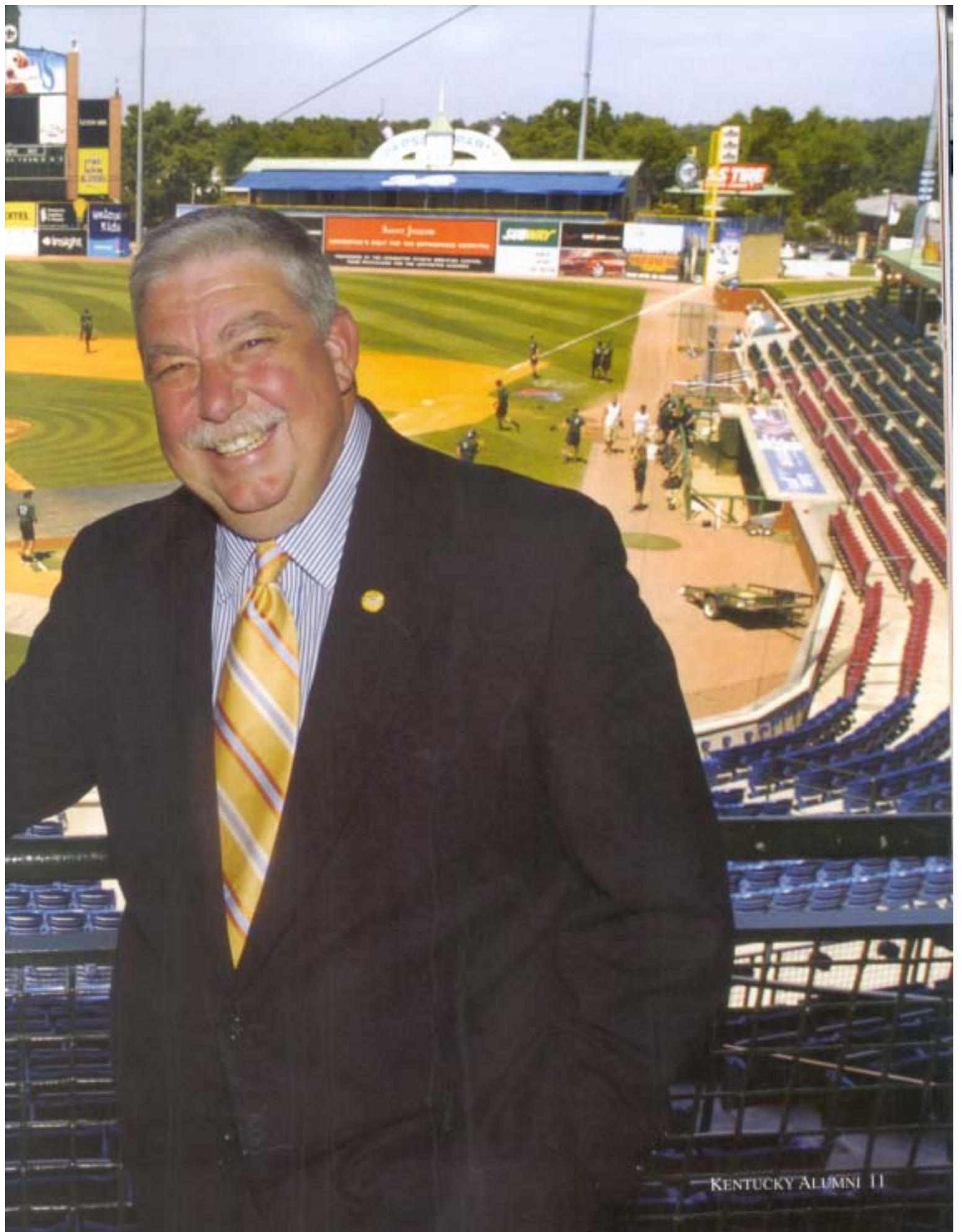


Alan Stein

The Man Behind The Legends

By Robin Roenker

Photo: ©2005 John Summers II



KENTUCKY ALUMNI 11



Alan Stein and staff greet fans at the front gate of Applebee's Park before a game against West Virginia Power.



Stein isn't specific with the number, but he is proud that the franchise sold "for more money than any other minor league team, regardless of classification." That means Lexington's A-level team is a hotter commodity right now than many of the country's larger, more prestigious AAA teams (whose players are closer to making the jump to the majors).

So, how *did* he do that? It's all about having a vision of success and knowing how to reach it, Stein says.

This Is What Success Looks Like

Stein's success with the Lexington Legends has become the industry standard of how to run a profitable minor league team. "Our model, of doing it privately, is now a model that other people are trying to emulate," he says. "We are pretty well known and respected in our industry."

We're sitting in Stein's tastefully appointed office — which looks like a baseball team's CEO's office *should* look, with players' photographs and autographed bats, balls, and even a home plate filling the dark blue walls — as he reflects on this, his team's fifth anniversary season.

He tells me about the long road to bringing professional baseball back to Lexington. About how for 17 years he "did a lot of public speaking and a lot of arm twisting" to convince lenders and supporters that this was "more than just an idea, more than an avocation. That it could work." When others gave up along the way, Stein kept going.

The game needed a champion, and there was no one better than Alan Stein for the job. Stein's résumé says he "loves people and talking" and that's why most days at Applebee's Park you'll see him out chatting with fans, his favorite part of the job. Winner of the 2000 Public Relations Society of America's Communicator of the Year Award, Stein grew up giving speeches as a young boy in his Lexington synagogue, going on to win debate championships at Henry Clay High School and earn a full debate scholarship to UK.

During his time at UK between 1970-1974, Stein squeezed in business and history classes as part of a bachelor of general studies program in the midst of a hectic schedule that included stints as Student Center Board president, chairman of the Greek Activities Steering Committee, and national undergraduate president of his fraternity, Alpha Epsilon Pi, a role that



Photo: ©2005 John Sommers II

You never know who you'll run into at a Legends game. Stein, left, greets J. Peterman of the J. Peterman Company, a Lexington-based clothing and accessories business. John O'Hurley, appearing recently on television's *"Dancing with the Stars,"* portrayed Peterman on episodes of *"Seinfeld."*

took him to chapters throughout the country during his junior year.

Stein left UK a few credits shy of his degree, deciding to "try business" and follow in the footsteps of his father, Ed Stein, a Lexington businessman and real estate developer. As a first project, the young Stein renovated a bar in one of his father's restaurants, turning it into a thriving college nightspot, 803 South. "I just fell in love with business and entrepreneurship," Stein says, "and I stayed with it forever."

Stein went on to a successful career as a radio account executive and part owner of HMH Broadcasting, which owned Lexington stations WVLK AM-590 and K-93 FM, among others. When he and his partners, including Ralph Hacker, sold HMH, he retired from the radio industry in 1999 and "had some time and energy and a few dollars" on his hands. He decided to put them to use to bring baseball to the Bluegrass.

"All the businesses that I've ever had have all been about finding a niche in the market. If there's a talent that I have, it's identifying those niches and being able to market to them," Stein says. "And baseball is an extension of that. It didn't take a genius to figure out that we didn't have a lake or a riverfront, and not much else going on in the summertime between the end of UK basketball and Keeneland in the spring and then the beginning of UK football and Keeneland in the fall," he says. Plus, it didn't hurt that Stein has had a lifetime love of the game.

A devout Reds fan, Stein's eyes light up as he recalls train trips with his dad to Cincinnati's Union Terminal, across from Crosley Field, where they'd go to see his favorites play, like Frank Robinson and Tommy Helms. Members of Stein's staff were treated to a rare glimpse of their boss — Mr. Communicator himself — nearly speechless when he got to meet Robinson at a baseball

Minor Leagues Not So Minor Anymore

Minor league baseball is a booming business these days. The \$500 million industry drew nearly 40 million fans last year, breaking the previous minor league attendance record set in 1949.

Big-name stars like Bill Murray, Nolan Ryan, Cal Ripken, and Magic Johnson have all recently bought slices of minor league affiliates, hoping to cash in on their recent popularity, while teams' gross revenues have increased 91 percent in the last 10 years.

Source: *Newsweek*, May 9, 2005.

industry meeting this year. "I was like a blathering little kid, and I said what every other idiot would have said to him, 'You're my favorite player!'" Stein chuckles.

As fate would have it, Stein was honored in June by being inducted into the South Atlantic Baseball League Hall of Fame, where he now joins the ranks of Robinson, Tommy Lasorda, and the late A.B. "Happy" Chandler. In addition to this honor, he also was one of six members inducted this spring into the inaugural class of the Lexington Legends Hall of Fame.

Stein's not above poking fun at himself, as is clear from his string of opening-game bets with his players. He's 0-5 in stunts that have seen him eating cat food, camping out in the stadium for three days — despite temperatures in the 30s and threats of tornadoes — playing bat boy, and shaving his head, after Legends first-game losses in previous seasons.

"Minor league baseball is about being fun, and being a little irreverent," he says. "We don't have to take ourselves too seriously. I like that." He and his staff work to come up with fun gimmicks to keep fans coming back. This season one ticket holder won 10 percent of a race horse's earnings for the year, for instance. Their model is making the Applebee's Park experience the best it can be, focusing on cleanliness, safety, entertainment, and value, he says.

Stein's proud that as the state's 17th top tourist attraction, the Legends pull season ticket holders from over 60 Kentucky counties and bring in some \$30 million to the local economy, helping to give a boost to the previously struggling north side of town.

Through the Legends Charitable Giving Foundation, which Stein and his partners established, the team has given back to the community in other ways as well, to agencies such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters of the Bluegrass and the Center for Women, Children, and Families. A dedicated volunteer with Bluegrass United Way and other groups, Stein also encourages his Legends staff of

Alan Stein, center, leads a rendition of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" during pre-game activities.

29 to volunteer, even if on company time. And he's always looking for ways to promote baseball in the region, even allowing UK's and Transylvania's college teams to make use of Applebee's Park for a few of their home games.

"His support of baseball in Lexington is unparalleled," says UK's head baseball coach John Cohen.

As we chat, I catch a glimpse of his green and blue championship ring from that storied 2001 inaugural season. He notices my glance and says proudly, "I'll always wear this ring, until they get me another one." Maybe this year's the year, he adds. "This is a special team, as good a team as we've ever had." Now that playoff season is around the corner, he's hopeful of their chances for another title.

And then I ask him to be honest: Given the championship win, their status as one of the top minor league teams in terms of attendance, and all the other accolades, isn't Stein himself just a *bit* surprised at the level of success the Legends have seen in the past five years?

"No. I am never surprised by success," he says matter-of-factly. And then he shares with me his philosophy for living, one as appropriate for a locker



Photo: ©2008 John Summers II

room pep talk as a college commencement address. "I'm a person who believes if you get up early, work as hard as you can work, always tell the truth, and do everything you say you're going to do, then you'll always be successful."

It's a philosophy Stein encourages with his Legends staff as well as his family. He has three children, stepson Wade Hancock, a sophomore at UK; son Scooter, a sophomore at Henry Clay High School, and daughter Hadley, a freshman, also at Henry Clay. He and his wife, State Representative Kathy Wright Stein, UK Law '83, have been married for 17 years.

For Alan Stein, success means having a vision. "If you close your eyes at night and you dream about what it looks like, there are two things you can do. You can say, these are the resources that I have, how close can I get to that with these resources? Or, you can be a dreamer, a person with a vision, and you say, this is what success looks like, tell me what resources I need to get there. You find them, and you go do it."

Exactly What He Imagined

Stein is decidedly in the dreamer camp.

"He has a vision of what success looks like, and he works every day to get the staff to start at the top to get there," says Legends General Manager Kevin Kulp.

Stein's company, Ivy Walls, recently purchased another minor league team, the Southwest Michigan Devil Rays in Battle Creek, and he and Shea have plans to purchase five or six more, including perhaps some indoor football or minor league hockey teams.

"We want to do in the aggregate across our teams two to three million in attendance per year, with \$40-60 million in revenues. That would duplicate what the major league teams do, without the 69-70 percent investment they have to make in players," Stein says.

Here at home, Stein's goal with Applebee's Park is to make it an entertainment venue 365 days a year — offering concerts and other events outside baseball season — that can attract some 450,000 to 500,000 people to Lexington's north side annually.

Now, four years after the stadium opened, fans still come up to Stein when he's at the park's front gates and say, "I had no idea this is what you had in mind."

And he tells them it's exactly what he imagined. After all, he had a vision.

Robin Roenker '98 AS is a freelance writer in Lexington.

Baseball and UK



Beginning its 109th year in 2005, the University of Kentucky baseball program has featured 23 coaches, 11 All-Americans, 61 All-SEC selections and 85 professional players, while compiling a 1439-1288-22 (.527) overall record since the Wildcats took the field for the first time in the spring of 1896.

The inaugural pitch in UK baseball history was thrown on April 3, 1896, in a double-header against Centre College. Despite finishing its first season with a 1-2 record, the Wildcats would go on to post a 132-70 record over the next 17 seasons.

Coach Frank Moseley was instrumental in the rebirth of Kentucky baseball following World War II. Moseley's final two squads reached the NCAA Tournament in 1949 and 1950. The 1949 team also included UK's first All-American, Dom Fucci. Other standouts of the Moseley era included C.M. Newton, Ralph Beard and Wallace "Wah Wah" Jones (Beard and Jones also were All-American basketball players.), and football players Doug Moseley and Babe Parilli.

From 1951 until 1965, Harry Lancaster served as the Wildcats' chief, gathering a 163-164-3 record. Lancaster later served as Athletics Director at Kentucky and ranks as the second winningest coach in UK baseball history. Lancaster's 163 victories stand second only to Coach Keith Madison's 696.

From 1979 through 2003, Madison guided the Cats to 15 winning seasons and coached 83 academic All-SEC selections, 19 first-team All-SEC performers, 16 second-team All-SEC picks, nine All-SEC Eastern Division athletes and placed 15 players on SEC All-Tournament teams, including the 1981 MVP, Jeff Keener. Keener also led the nation in lowest earned run average, posting a diminutive 0.51 ERA in 1981. By posting a 41-20 mark, his 1991 squad set the UK record for most wins in a season, while his 1994 team led the SEC and NCAA with 110 home runs.

Current Status

Starting in 2004, John Cohen, already established as one of the best hitting coaches in the country with a two year stint at Florida in Gainesville, coached his first team to a 24-30 overall record, batting 15 points higher while the slugging percentage jumped 68 points. UK's 2005 season saw the Wildcats finish 29-27 overall and 7-22 in the Southeastern Conference. The 29 wins are the second most for UK since the 1997 season and the most in five years.

His 2004 recruiting class was rated as one of the top 25 by *Collegiate Baseball* and included one high school All-American and the 2004 Kentucky Mr. Baseball.

Cohen also has improved Kentucky baseball in the classroom. In his first year, a school-record nine Wildcats were named to the SEC Academic Honor Roll. In the fall of 2004, 20 of 37 players earned a grade-point average of 3.0 or better.

— Courtesy www.ukathletics.com

In the Major Leagues

Since 1910 when the first UK baseball player, Jim Park, went off to play major league ball, many others have been drafted. Currently Joe Blanton pitches for the Oakland Athletics. In June he was named the American League Rookie of the Month. Blanton made six starts in the month, going at least six innings in each and only once allowing more than two earned runs. The 24-year-old posted a 5-1 record accompanied by a 2.06 ERA.

Brandon Webb plays for the Arizona Diamondbacks. He's ranked fifth in MLB's IP. Webb's signature pitch is a devastating sinker, and it's one of the best in the game.

The player who stuck the longest is Terry Shumpert (UK 1983-86). Altogether, he played 14 seasons as a second baseman spending five years each with the Kansas City Royals and the Colorado Rockies.

Playing 11 seasons were Doug Flynn (UK in 1969) with the Cincinnati Reds and New York Mets, along with other teams, and Jim Leyritz (UK 1985) with the New York Yankees and Anaheim Angels, among others.

Clocking out after 10 seasons was Jeff Parrett (UK 1980-83), who played mostly with the Montreal Expos.

Cotton Nash, more often recalled as an All-American basketball player (UK 1961-1964) played MLB three years, one with the Chicago White Sox and two with the Minnesota Twins.