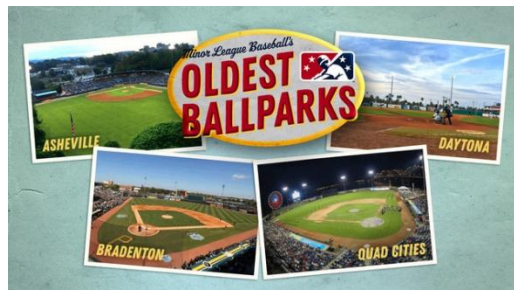


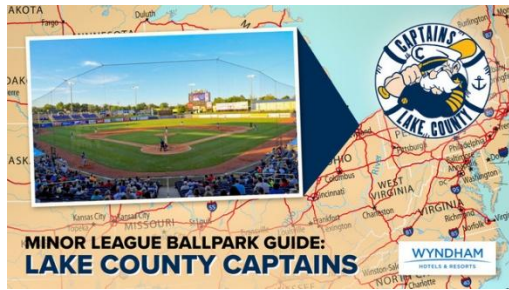


Every Artifact Tells a Story - A Stadium's Journey

This month we look at an artifact that has drawn much attention in the last calendar year. Yes, I said 'artifact'. Can a baseball stadium built in 2002 in Eastlake, Ohio be a historic artifact? The definition suggests yes. It is an object made by humans and left behind by a past culture. It does provide essential clues about the past and is used to study everyday life and ancient behaviors. Is this artifact merely something vintage, historic or simply an outdated relic. A car is deemed a classic at about 20 to 25 years. A building needs to reach 50+ years while a stadium can fall into that category once its lifespan reaches the longevity mark of 30 to 50 years with multiple generations of fan history. While there is no single rulebook with which to guide us to the best conclusion, Eastlake Stadium, as it was first named, does reach many of the historic benchmarks. Dubbed by some as the 'Crown Jewel of Lake County' or 'The Mistake in Eastlake' this stadium's journey is now part of the fabric of Lake County history. This month Peabody and Sherman's Wayback Machine traces the origin story of MiLB and Lake County, Ohio. Buildings are storytellers and baseball ballparks are recognizable landmarks that preserve our history on all levels. Here is the story of one such building located in Eastlake, Ohio and its footprint in time.

Minor League Baseball history is deeply rooted in class and community centered history. These ballparks had an irresistible charm and soon became beloved neighborhood icons. Some ballparks predate City Island Park in Daytona (1914) now known as Jackie Robinson Park (1946). Other contending early ballparks were in Bradenton, Asheville and Quad Cities.





The story of Eastlake's ballpark began in April 1999 with a 'pitch'. A 'pitch' for a minor league franchise and a local stadium to be exact. Since most minor league clubs are located in North Carolina, California, Texas or Florida, this was an important ask. May 2000 found Tom Chema joining the process. Chema was heavily involved in the Gateway Development Corporation-Jacobs / Progressive Field-Quicken Loans Arena complex. June 2000 saw the City of Eastlake and Mayor Dan DiLiberto direct \$1,000,000 for the

purchase of land. An Ohio Arts & Sports Commission grant and another \$4,000,000 loan secured by the city were used to purchase 17 acres by late 2000. December 16, 2000 marks the day when reality hit. In a split decision, DLR Group of Tampa, Florida was chosen to construct the new ballpark in Eastlake. That cost of \$800,000 was quickly folded into another series of loans that came in at 22 million. Early 2001 resulted in a MOU with the local residents to obtain the Quad City River Bandits for Eastlake Stadium. Within months this promise falls thru as several State Court Issues see the River Bandits reverse course on their agreement. January 2002 sees Ray and Katy Murphy and NE Ohio residents the Carfagnas agree to move their Columbus, Georgia Reddstixx franchise to Eastlake. The deal called for a ten year lease with a \$25,000,000 price tag. May 2002 groundbreaking was soon followed by cement pouring in June, steel construction and surface install in November and suites completed by February 2003. Classic Ballpark or Eastlake Stadium opens April 10, 2003. The new stadium had approximately 6500 seats with a total capacity with suites of 7,273 fans more or less. The price tag to date exceeded \$27,000,000. Renamed the Captains, this relocation was a joint effort by the Cleveland Indians to consolidate their farm system and bring their athletes/prospects closer to Cleveland. The High-A affiliate was now 18 miles from downtown Cleveland and the northern most division member of the South Atlantic League.



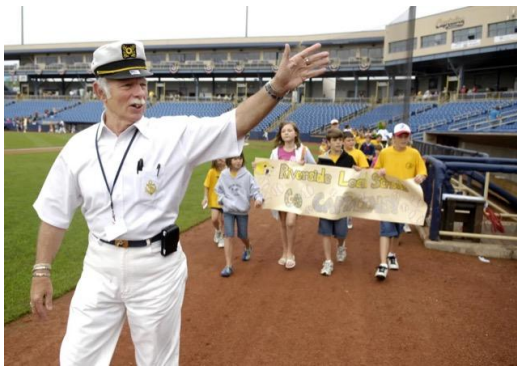
Luis Rivera was the first manager. Success was immediate as the team won both halves of the season and compiled an overall record of 97-43 in year one. It would take several more years before a league title would arrive but 2010 did come and a second championship came in 2024. Omir Santos piloted the most recent championship roster and is currently the longest tenured manager in team history. Notable names in early franchise history included Russell Branyan, Steve Kline, Richie Sexson, Jaret Wright and CC

Sabathia. In the Eastlake era, names like Francisco Lindor, Jose Ramirez, Eric Haase, Shane Bieber, Trevor Crowe, Chris Gimenez, Josh Tomlin, Gio Urshela, Clint Frazier, Will Benson, Cooper Ingle, Travis Bazzana, Petey Halpin, Gavin Williams and Chase DeLauter should sound familiar. A 'Call Up Club' wall at the park main entrance features a series of bronze plaques with the names of former Captains players who made the show.

Earlier it was mentioned MiLB focuses on community centered history and Classic Auto Campus Park, as it is now known, has that element too. Paying homage to its Lake Erie proximity and roots, the stadium features a Cargo Hold Gift Shop, Castaway Bay Bar and Poop Decks. The primary mascot is a 6' bird named Skipper who hails from Captains Cove Island somewhere in the middle of Lake Erie. Other mascots in recent years have included Old Skip, Skippy, a cormorant named Horatio and the return from retirement of Cleveland Stadium's 1981 Baseball Bug. Many fans will remember Captain Tony (Anthony Tarantino) who greeted guests at the gates during the early years as well as lighting the lighthouse beacon in centerfield after each Lake County home run. Captain Kenny followed some years later and was a ballpark fixture for years. Sadly, the keepers and lighthouse have been lost to the footprints of time



SKIPPER



CAPTAIN TONY

Buildings are storytellers and baseball stadiums are excellent repositories of all kinds of stories. They teach us about our history, good and bad. They tell us stories about baseball, its players and about people. Classic Auto Campus Park has long been a library of these stories. Over its evolving history names such as Greg Allen, Tyler Naquin, Dave Wallace and Rafael Perez come to mind. Community names like Kurt, Dana, Neil, Grover, Drew, Otto and others bear mentioning. Baseball is generational, Eastlake Stadium and its impact will always remain a part of the fabric of Lake County cultural history. Long Live Local - Go Captains!!

“You Might Be A Lake County Captains Fan If...”

Test your knowledge of the ever-evolving history of baseball in Ohio's smallest county with the most passionate fanbase.

1. This former Oakland A's multiple World Series champion player managed the team to its first league championship in 2010. Can you name him?
2. Over 11 Captains coaches and 125 Captains players have been called up to the 'majors'. Classic Ballpark has a special section to pay tribute to the organizational players who have made it. What is the official name of this tribute wall located near the main entrance?
3. Miracle Fields exceed 270 in number worldwide. More than 200,000 special needs athletes participate in these sponsored leagues. With assistance from UHHS, a Miracle League of Lake County opened with the full support of the Captains organization at our ballpark site in July of what year?
4. In Mascot Lore, standing out requires talent, commitment and persistence. If you are lacking that, perhaps a ridiculous costume might do. What is Skipper's favorite movie and pastime? Horatio the cormorant mascot loves the sport of hurling. What is his favorite band and sports team?

Answers: 4 Sandlot, waterskiing on Lake Erie, Flock of Seagulls, Toledo Walleye.
 3. 2018 2. Call-Up Wall 1. Ted Kubiak

Recent MiLB Factoids:

- The concept of a minor league farm system dates back to 1922. At its peak in 1949, 448 MiLB clubs existed. There are now 13 MiLB Leagues with approximately 205 teams spread out in the US.
- Restructuring in 2021 left 149 affiliates with 120 full season clubs. This means 11 full Season leagues - AAA, AA, High-A, Low-A
- Sahlen Field in Buffalo (AAA Blue Jays affiliate) has the largest stadium capacity with 16,600 seats.
- Captains MiLB history can be traced back to Georgia - 1991 (Columbus Indians), 1992-2002 (Columbus RedStixx), Lake County Captains (2003-present). The current team has played in the South Atlantic League (Sally) 2003-2009 and versions of the Midwest League 2010 - 2019 , current alignment since 2021.
- Cleveland Guardians affiliates in 2026 were the Hill City Howlers, Captains, Rubberducks and Clippers, Low-A, High-A, AA, AAA.

Sources: Encyclopedia of Cleveland History 2024 / <https://case.edu/ech> News-Herald, December 16, 2000. timetoast.com (Captains Ballpark), Scene Magazine, July 2001

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