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Shutterbug at the Cove

Local photographer has exhibit at Harris Branch Library

By JACK WALTON
Tribune Correspondent

GRANGER -- "People like to watch video, but they will *study* still photography," says D. Brent Miller. The official photographer of the South Bend Silver Hawks, Miller has assembled 20 shots from 2004 for the collection, "A Season of Baseball: Images of the South Bend Silver Hawks." The exhibit, which opened April 2, runs through April 29 in the Harris Meeting Room Gallery of the Harris Branch Library on Elm Road in Granger.

Miller approaches photography from the perspective of a storyteller. The images he presents are not merely snapshots of highlights, but multifaceted scenes, full of drama and complexity. In one photo from the installation, pitcher Danny Muegge has fielded a dribbling ground ball and is poised to throw to first for the out. His right leg is tucked beneath him, his left fully outstretched, and he grips the ball moments before firing to first base.

"The batter had taken a pretty good swing, but the ball just bloomed onto the field in front of home plate," remembers Miller. "The dew had started early that night, Danny went running after it, slipped on the grass, and had to throw from the ground." The hitter is seen in the background, blurred as he races to first base. The moment is rich in



Silver Hawks mascot Swoop and outfielder Mike Goss ham it up for the fans before a game last July.



Outfielder Jon Kaplan dives into third base against the Beloit Snappers



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possibilities: will the pitcher be able to hit his mark from such an unfortunate angle, or will he send the ball sailing over the first baseman's head? The photograph provokes the imagination.

The scenario did have a pleasant result for the Silver Hawks, Miller happily reports. "Danny threw him out pretty easily."

A team photo is the first image in the collection. Miller organized the sequence of pictures to flow almost like the season itself, beginning with shots of pre-game stretching and autograph signing before focusing on great plays. Other pictures early in the installation reflect the ambience of the ballpark experience, from a player goofing around with Swoop, the team mascot, to a group of fans throwing their arms into the "Y" of a "YMCA" singalong.

Tony Wittrock, director of sales and marketing for the Silver Hawks, says, "Brent never quits working. He's always looking for a new place to get a good photo." Praising Miller's ability to capture expressions, Wittrock cites a photo of a player, nearly horizontal, diving into third base. "You can see the veins popping in his neck," says Wittrock.

Action shots abound in the second part of the collection. In one notable photo, Andrew McCreery hits his first professional grand slam home run. The batter's eyes are in sharp focus, his head perfectly still as he locks in on the flight of the ball. The photo captures the young slugger in the moment that he realizes he has launched a bases-clearing blast. A teammate on the bench behind him knows it too, and has begun yelling. Minor leaguers are trying to impress and be noticed, and this hitter has just put four runs on the board with one swing.

"When I handed Andrew the photo, he told me that the grand slam was the greatest highlight of his life," says Miller.

A painterly sense of composition graces other photos, such as "Alberto Gonzalez Scores a Run Against Cedar Rapids." At left, the umpire swings his arms vigorously, signifying that the runner is

during a July 5, 2004, game.

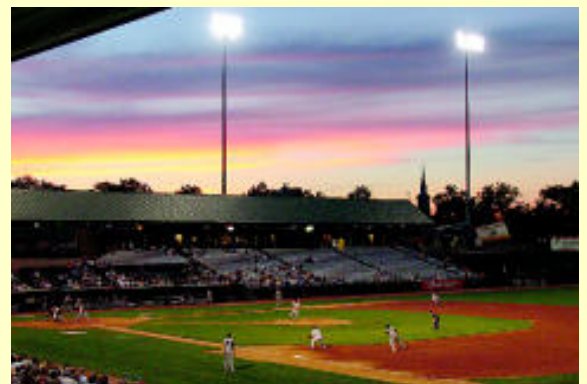


A young fan awaits an autographed baseball from Alberto Gonzalez during a break in the action of a South Bend Silver Hawks game last year.

Photos provided/ D. BRENT MILLER



Silver Hawks pitcher Danny Muegge throws from a sitting position in this photo taken during the Aug. 23, 2004, game. Photographer D. Brent Miller has assembled photos from last season that are on display at the Harris Branch Library in Granger.



The sun sets over Coveleski Stadium

safe. In the middle, Gonzalez is already springing to his feet after his slide, and at right the catcher tries too late to tag the runner out. The poses of the three create an almost geometric figure.

Miller, who taught photography and journalism at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, is well versed in the history and theory of photojournalism. He also recognizes the role of luck and chance. "Sometimes you just have the camera pointed in the right direction when something happens," Miller says.

In 2003, D. Brent Miller exhibited his documentary project, "Last Days of the Oliver Chilled Plow Works," at the Northern Indiana Center for History, and he is currently shooting photos for a project focused on the history of the St. Joseph River.

He will also be following the Silver Hawks throughout the 2005 season.

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as the South Bend Silver Hawks play during a late August game last year.

Photos provided/D. BRENT MILLER

See the exhibit

D. Brent Miller's "A Season of Baseball: Images of the South Bend Silver Hawks" runs through April 29 in the Harris Meeting Room Gallery of the Harris Branch Library in Granger, 51446 Elm Road. For more information, visit www.dbrent.com.