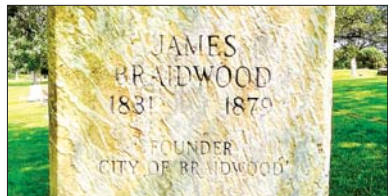


A fresh look for founder's grave



Lady Cats are tourney champions



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## All is not lost for the Wildcats

BY ERIC FISHER  
PUBLISHER

Until Friday night, the last time the Wildcats lost their football opener was 11 years ago.

It was a time when Wilmington had the luxury of scheduling all Interstate Eight Conference opponents. There were 12 teams in the I-8 so the conference was split into six teams each in Large and Small divisions.

The Wildcats, (Small) hosted Coal City (Large) back in 2012, so no matter who won, it was considered a non-conference game. The Coalers surprised the 'Cats 13-12 leaving the Wildcat faithful suffering the opening week blues.

Nevertheless, Coach Jeff Reents and staff regrouped by Week 2 and the 'Cats followed with five straight shutout wins. After a blemish suffered at Plano, Wilmington finished as the undefeated I-8 Small champions (5-0) and advanced to the quarterfinal game against Sterling Newman. The contest ended in a 28-26 heartbreaker as the 'Cats ended up 9-3 overall and only one win away from making a state appearance.

For seven of the past 30 seasons since Reents has been in charge, opening week losses have happened to even the best. Look at 1995 when the 'Cats were scoreless to Peotone, 27-0. The lead running back in that game was Damien Anderson who went on to break records at Northwestern and play for the Arizona Cardinals.

In 2006 and 2007 Wilmington lost back-to-back season openers, 31-6, 7-6, to

SEE CATS PAGE 14



Photo by Eric Fisher

IT'S JUST ONE GAME—Wilmington head coach Jeff Reents (center) addresses his players Friday after losing the season opener to Seneca 27-21. The Wildcats matched the hosting Irish touchdown for touchdown until the fourth quarter when the 'Cats had the ball looking for a final drive and they were stopped at midfield. Seneca, who finished 10-1 a year ago, may be the best 2A team in the state and it's possible these two teams could meet again in the playoffs. But a lot of victories have to take place before then.

## Coalition addresses alcohol and teens

BY MARNEY SIMON  
EDITOR

Members of the community gathered together at Wilmington City Hall on Aug. 24, for a frank talk about alcohol and how it affects teens.

The Town Hall meeting was sponsored by the Wilmington Coalition for a Healthy Community, and attracted residents looking to find the best ways to help local youth, as well as their families, understand the dangers that exist with underage alcohol use and misuse.

The discussion got a Major League boost, thanks to panelist Scott Spiezio. The Morris native and two-time World Series Champion spoke to those in attendance about how alcohol, and later cocaine, affected his life and his career in the Big Leagues.

Spiezio, who was drafted by the Oakland As in 1993 and later went on to win two World Series rings, one with Anaheim and one with St. Louis, said he didn't drink much as a teen or early in his career, when he was focused hard on getting to the next



TWO TIME WORLD Series winner and Morris native Scott Spiezio discusses his addiction to alcohol during a special Town Hall meeting on Aug. 24, hosted by the Wilmington Coalition for a Healthy Community.

level. But, he said, peer pressure as his career grew to cut loose and have drinks with his friends and teammates set the groundwork for future issues. He said that while he continued being active in his church and community, a spinal injury in spring training one

road, at bars. One thing led to another, I remember I was sipping a beer and I didn't like it, but someone [suggested a mixed drink], so I choked one down and after two or three days in a row, I started liking it."

Spiezio said his poor decision making spiraled from there, as well as his need for more and more alcohol.

His drinking eventually led to the collapse of his marriage, affected how often he could see his children, and even though he had returned to the field by this point, his career was starting to tank.

"I had four of my best years in Anaheim, and all of a sudden I had two of my worst years," he said. "I had the best family life and the best group of friends both during my career while I was playing and in the off season in Morris. But, things just started crumbling, and as things started crumbling I just depended on drugs and alcohol even more."

Spiezio said in 2006, when he played with the Cardinals, he often drank and used

SEE TOWN HALL, PAGE 2

## Wilmington prepares a spot along the Mother Road

BY MARNEY SIMON  
EDITOR

As Historic Route 66 nears its 100th birthday, the City of Wilmington is preparing to take its rightful place as a stopover along the 2,448-mile Mother Road.

In partnership with Heritage Corridor Destinations, the Conventions and Visitors Bureau for the first 100 miles of the scenic byway, the city has plans to erect a mural facing downtown Water Street.

But even more visitor friendly will be a new Route 66 monument sign, which was delivered to the city on Aug. 14.

The six-foot tall sign, perfect for tourists looking for a Route 66 selfie, will be installed along the roadway, likely near the city's center.

"There are a couple of locations that we have identified, but I think the number one location that we're looking at is the South Island, the frontage where the shed is on that side," city administrator Jeannine Smith said during a

meeting of the City Council earlier this month.

The sign was paid for utilizing a portion of a \$40,000 grant that the city received from Heritage Corridor Destinations, which will also be utilized to pay for the Route 66 mural downtown. The city is responsible for placement of the monument sign, as well as maintenance, through the historic byway's centennial celebration in 2026.

But even after that celebration is over, the city can incorporate the monument sign into its long term planning for tourism and recreation.

"In the preliminary parks plan that was reviewed and not approved by city council, they talked about realigning the [entrances to the north and south islands] so that it would go straight across. There is space in there for additional

SEE ROUTE 66, PAGE 2



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