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Visiting ABC Supply Stadium, new home of the Beloit Snappers

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It will be forever known as the ballpark that saved professional baseball in south-central Wisconsin, as the **Beloit Snappers** (High-A Central) will open **ABC Supply Stadium** next Tuesday. We received a sneak peek.

If you're a regular *Ballpark Digest* reader, you know the decades-long journey of the Snappers to build a replacement for **Pohlman Field**, the team's home since its inception. In the end, it took the efforts of local business leader **Diane Hendricks** and area native **Quint Studer**, owner of the Pensacola Blue Wahoos (Double-A South), to finance and build a new ballpark.

So we now have ABC Supply Stadium, built in 13 months at a cost of \$37 million. Hendricks was key to ballpark development on every level—her hometown firm, ABC Supply, holds naming rights, and she was closely involved with the creation of the nonprofit Riverbend Stadium Authority (RSA) and construction—as was Studer, who had already gone through the ballpark construction process in Pensacola. The RSA built and financed the ballpark; the Snappers manage and operate it.

The result is a ballpark that reflects the market and perhaps the principals as well: it's not flashy, necessarily, but it works well and should provide a comfortable experience for locals. Rock County is not a market with an abundance of large corporations—apart from local government units, the largest employers are health-care firms—and while you can expect some Rockford folks to cross the state line, we are talking about a modest market.



Though growing. Downtown Beloit is a trendy spot, filled with plenty of restaurants, coffeeshops, bars and small retail establishments. The new ballpark, featuring a view of downtown from grandstand seating and located on the shores of the Rock River, is part of the recent development investments made on the riverfront in the last decade. (Yes, there is occasional flooding in the Rock River and the ballpark is on a flood plain, but everyone is confident the ballpark will be fine in the case of flooding.) ABC Supply Stadium is designed to be an extension of downtown Beloit, with a center-field entrance opening to downtown. The expectation is that many fans will park downtown, perhaps partake of a pregame snort, and then stroll to a game and enter via a center-field gate. The Snappers say there are 1,500 public parking spaces within a 10-minute walk. The eight-acre location is cozy, to be sure.



As is the ballpark, seating only 3,500 for baseball at opening with a total capacity of 6,000 for concerts and other similar events where the field can be used for seating. Speaking of the field: yes, it features synthetic turf, though the infield and bases are on dirt and clay. The decision to go with synthetic turf allows for events during most of the year, with an open center-field gate making it easy to bring trucks and stages on and off the field.



As noted, this is not a flashy ballpark, as designed by Jones Petrie Rafinski. There are some nice design touches: the ballpark is clad with 250,000 bricks, giving it a classic, timeless feel. It features no individual suites, though the second level of the grandstand features the Beloit Health System Club, allowing for year-round events with up to 300 people. And there are plenty of group spaces, including an indoor supersuite that can be used year-round, as well as a right-field party deck and outfield group areas. There is the expected 360-degree concourse. A small berm in the left-field corner is served by a beer stand, with plenty of drink rails for those who love to wander the ballpark and take in the action from multiple vantage points.



And there will be plenty of food offerings for those who love wandering the ballpark. A Leinenkugel-branded beer stand serves fans in the left-field corner, while the right-field corner sports a large bar offering a variety of drinks, including what we think will become ABC Supply Stadium's signature offering: a brandy Old-Fashioned slushie. You don't get more Sconnie than a brandy Old-Fashioned sweet, and serving it as a slushie makes for a great ballpark experience.

That slushie, by the way, comes from local food and beverage concessionaire Geronimo Hospitality Group, which features a variety of gameday fare ranging from ballpark staples to higher-end offerings. For instance, fans looking for classic ballpark food can check out Pohlman's, a nod to Harry Pohlman, whose name graces the team's former home, Pohlman Field. Its menu features a cheeseburger, veggie burger, chicken tenders, hot dogs and other fan favorites.

Sausage Haus is a take on all-things sausage with sausages sourced from local staple Pinnon's Meats. el Jefe's features street tacos, nachos and more. Wisco on a Stick features carnival fare, including cheese curds, boozy shakes and funnel cakes. Big Philly's menu reflects its name through a variety of Philly cheesesteaks, and The Meat Ball offers a meatball sandwich. We tried the indulgent funnel cakes and the boozy shakes, which indeed live up to their name. Food trucks will rotate in and out during the season; the opening-day festivities featured a barbeque smoker.



As you'd expect with a 13-month construction timeline, there are portions of the ballpark to be filled in, such as a second-level first-base group area/suite and an outfield kids play area. And there's more room for further growth in the area, with open land to the south of the ballpark on the other side of the Wisconsin-Illinois state line, literally across the street from the ballpark.

But the ballpark was designed both to meet MiLB's new facility guidelines and the needs of the local market upon opening. Both goals appear to be met. The Snappers say the design conforms to MiLB's new facility rules, with designs altered in the design-build process to add a larger visitors clubhouse, a visitors batting cage and a womens' dressing room. And an eight-acre site allowed for a spacious feel to the ballpark, between the wraparound concourse, expansive club and plenty of spots for just hanging out at the ballgame. At the end of the day, ABC Supply Stadium was designed to keep Minor League Baseball in Beloit, and on that level it succeeds.

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About Kevin Reichard

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