

## A public life

*After 15 years as general manager of the Regina Pats, Brent Parker looks back...and ahead*

BY RYAN HOLOTA



**B**rent Parker has been in the public eye in Regina since he moved here over 15 years ago as the General Manager of the Regina Pats. As he moves into the next phase of his life, he sat down with Fine Lifestyles to discuss his past and his future.

Parker and his wife, Karen, have raised two children in Regina: their son, Casey, is entering his first year at Campbell Collegiate and their daughter, Carlie, is attending Humber College in Toronto, where she will play for the Volleyball team.

When asked if his son, who also plays hockey, would like to play for the Pats one day, Parker says, "No, if he makes it he wants to do it elsewhere; he's just been drafted by the Everett Silvertips, so if he plays he hopes it will be for them."

### The Parker family story

Russ Parker moved from Moosomin to Calgary in 1960 to find work. Always a Regina Pats fan, Russ was a sports fanatic who wanted to own a sports team. Through hard work and determination, Russ and his wife, Dianne, fulfilled their dream by purchasing a AAA baseball franchise and moving it to Calgary in 1985.

Working for their parents' baseball fran-

chise, the Parker children spent time doing laundry, working on the grounds crew, acting as bat boys and working in the concessions. "It was a great way to grow up," says Parker. "It taught me the value of hard work, and has helped me greatly today in understanding the challenges our current staff have."

A huge hockey fan, Brent Parker grew up playing hockey, and attended WHL Camps with the Calgary Wranglers, Billings Bighorns and Nanaimo Islanders. He eventually pursued his other passion and accepted a baseball scholarship to attend Treasure Valley Junior College in Oregon before transferring to the University of Arkansas in Little Rock.

In the late 1980s the Parkers purchased the Kansas City Blades of the IHL, where they won the 1992 Turner Cup Championship. It was in early 1995 that Russ and Diane Parker were approached by Ed Chynoweth, President of the WHL, because the current owners of the Regina Pats were looking to sell the team. With the Parkers' experience running sports franchises and their Saskatchewan connection, Chynoweth

felt that they would be a natural fit for the team.

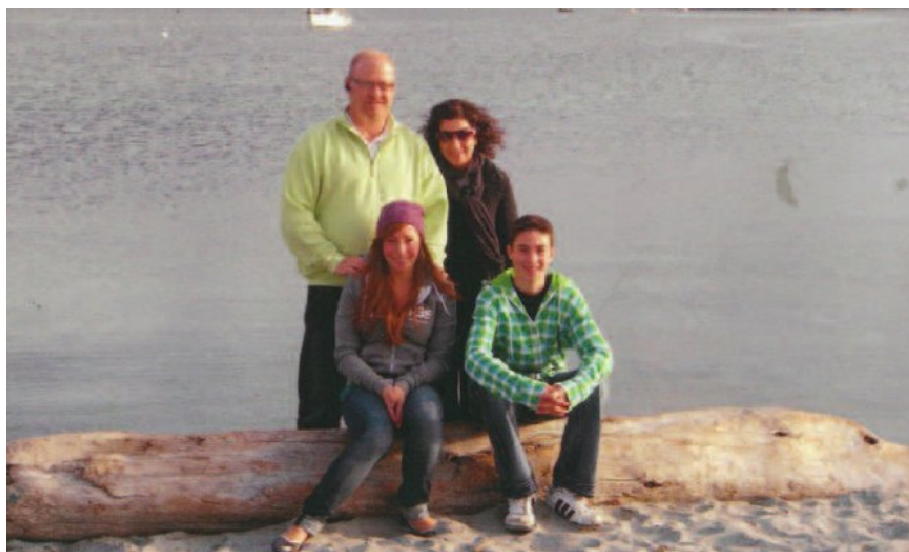
### Starting fresh In Regina

The 1995/1996 season brought new ownership to the Regina Pats, and along with the ownership came a new general manager: Brent Parker. Brent had been running the family's Junior A franchise in Kelowna and was excited to move to Saskatchewan.

For that 1995/1996 season, the Regina Pats had only 490 season ticket holders. The new management brought new coaching staff, new marketing people, new receptionists, new philosophies, and the belief that it was very important for the team to take on a more active role in the community.

"It is really important with any franchise, in any city, to be good members of the community," says Parker. "This meant getting the team involved with a wide range of activities, from getting the players into schools, to getting them involved in coaching and charities."

Under Parker's leadership, the Pats involvement in community charities has



grown. They have promoted Breast Cancer Awareness Month by playing with pink sticks and pink jerseys, and then raffling them off for charity. They hold The Annual Pats' Wickenheiser Golf Classic supporting the Saskatchewan Cancer agency and The Caring Hearts Camp for Kids golf tournament. The Pats are also actively involved with KidSport Saskatchewan, donating money raised from their Sportsman's Dinner.

The Pats are also involved with the Heart and Stroke Foundation and participate in a pizza delivery night with Western Pizza. Members of the Regina Pats, wearing their jerseys, deliver the pizzas, and all proceeds go to the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

The Pats are a major supporter of minor hockey in Regina as well, sponsoring the Pat Canadians Midget AAA Team, giving tournament donations and offering player appearances. This year the Pats will work with Tim Horton's and sponsor the entire Initiation Division. "All told, the Regina Pats donate between \$75,000 and \$100,000 back to the community every year."

Parker is especially proud of the players that have made up the teams over the years. Players become eligible for the draft at 15 years old, and can play at 16. These kids are often leaving home for the first time, and are still in high school. "Education is a very high priority for the league; we do a lot for them to promote education." The focus on education doesn't end with high school; for every year that a student plays with the WHL, they receive one year of tuition and books at an accredited post-secondary school.

## Challenges

The Regina Pats are the smallest market in which a WHL team has to deal with having a professional sports team in the same market. "We spend more on advertising than almost every team in our league, and with that, combined with our lease, which is at the higher end as well, it has been a challenge to remain viable."

Upon taking control of the team in 1995, Parker invested in the arena, filling

in a 12-foot gap between the boards and the seats commonly called "The Moat." Over the years, the Pats have also invested in office renovations, dressing room overhauls, and working with the park to build skyboxes. "The park has done a really nice job with the facility. There is more still to be done, but they understand that and have a plan."

## Looking back

Parker says that he has accomplished many of the things he set out to accomplish. The Pats have hosted a Memorial Cup tournament, All-Star games, the Canada-Russia Challenge, and created a more active fan base. The Pats sold more than 3,000 season tickets last year, a huge improvement from the first year Parker was GM.

"The Pats are a family owned, family run business. I've always tried to make decisions based on what I felt was right for the team," says Parker, looking back on his years as GM. "That doesn't always mean that I've made the right decisions. Over the years people have disagreed with my decisions, and that's fine, but it's unfair to criticize my commitment to this team."

Parker adds, "If I have offended people or rubbed people the wrong way because of my passion for this franchise, I apologize for that."

Living a life in sports can be like living under a microscope. Sometimes, even the most personal of details become common knowledge. "I received a phone call telling me that a story was coming out about my cancer diagnosis, and that if I wanted to release the news on my own that I should do it now. We hadn't even told our kids yet."

## Looking forward

Though he stepped down as GM of the Regina Pats in May, Parker is still involved as the club's President and Governor. While the team has come a long way since Parker first took control, a championship is still missing from the record. Parker decided that he had done what he could, and that it was time for some new blood to step up and take on the role of GM.

While his role has changed, Parker is still committed to bringing a championship home. As he steps back from directly influencing team decisions, he looks forward to being able to refocus his attention on his family and watch as the new team works to bring that elusive cup to Regina.

