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## Arvest Ballpark named Ballpark of the Year

For the second year in a row, a baseball park in Arkansas has been named the best in the land.

Arvest Ballpark, the first-year home of the Northwest Arkansas Naturals of the Double-A Texas League, has been named **Ballpark of the Year** by BASEBALLPARKS.COM. Site webmaster Joe Mock made the announcement today.

The honor is presented to the new baseball stadium with the best combination of superior design, attractive site selection and fan amenities. This is the ninth consecutive year for this award, and Arvest Ballpark joins some excellent company. Past winners include AT&T Park in San Francisco, Pittsburgh's PNC Park, Petco Park in San Diego and last year's winner, Dickey-Stephens Park in North Little Rock, Arkansas.

The Naturals' General Manager, Eric Edelstein, was delighted by the news. "Any time you're recognized as being the best at something, it's a special honor," he noted. "And this is especially true when you consider our park was going up against a Triple-A and a Major League park."

Indeed, also in the running for this year's award were Coca-Cola Park, the new International League facility in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania, Nationals Park in Washington, DC, and Dehler Park in Billings, Montana.

"It was a tough choice this year," noted Mock, who personally visits each new park and writes a detailed review for BASEBALLPARKS.COM. "The Washington Nationals' new ballpark has one of the nicest interiors in the sport, and the parks in Billings and the Lehigh Valley are both very special and fit beautifully in their communities.

"In the end, though, Arvest Ballpark had the most unique and aesthetically pleasing elements of the four. In this era when natural, sustainable building elements are the order of the day, Springdale's facility checked all of the right boxes."

HOK Sport, interestingly, was behind the architectural design of three of this year's new parks. Not only were they the architects in Washington and Lehigh Valley, they also came up with Arvest Ballpark's intriguing layout and use of natural building materials. "Yes, coming into this year, HOK had to be the odds-on favorite to win this award," joked Mock.

“Obviously we didn’t set out to design Arvest Ballpark solely for the accolades,” said Martin DiNitto, HOK Sport principal. “But we’re really pleased with the result in Springdale, and we’re just humbled that it is getting the recognition it deserves as being a modern ballpark that is of its time and place.”

“They (HOK) really outdid themselves in designing this park,” added Edelstein. “They told us that they had a lot of fun coming up with the vision for Arvest Ballpark. Things also lined up really well so that their vision could be fulfilled, and HOK didn’t let anything stand in their way – not financial matters, not political matters and not differences of opinion.

“We’re very happy with Arvest Ballpark, both in its design and in the (design’s) execution. This award is for the City of Springdale, HOK and the Naturals, because all three played a role in the way the park turned out,” Edelstein pointed out.

One element of the park will still be special many years from now, according to Texas League President Tom Kayser. “The ballpark in Northwest Arkansas definitely has an iconic feature,” he observed. “The roof there is very forward-looking, just as the community (of Springdale) is forward-looking.” Indeed, the park’s roof is unlike any other in baseball. The canopies that comprise the roof are both curved and white, to resemble clouds. At night, they are illuminated from underneath, making them even more attractive.

“The whole concept of the park runs counter to the norm in recent years,” continued Kayser. “Lately, the ‘retro’ look has been popular, but Bob and Mindy Rich (principal owners of the Naturals) didn’t want a design that looks backwards. Instead, they wanted a design that looks forward, but one that also uses natural (building) materials. This park was very successful in implementing this.”

The fans of Northwest Arkansas have certainly responded favorably to the new park in their backyard, as 341,806 have poured through the turnstiles heading into the last weekend of the season. This helped the Texas League shatter its all-time attendance record, topping its previous mark with 12 days left in the season.

The Naturals plan to celebrate the Ballpark of the Year honor as part of their Fan Appreciation Weekend, which caps off the regular season on August 30, 31 and September 1.

Mock’s in-depth review of Arvest Ballpark can be found at <http://www.baseballparks.com/NWA-1.asp>

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*For more information on this award or on BASEBALLPARKS.COM, contact Joe Mock at 512-826-0853.*

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