

Beer baron

Minnesota native is a mainstay at Cubs spring training games

By **BLAKE HERZOG**
TRIBUNE

Friday was a perfect day for beer, and for Mark the Beer Guy.

The 6-foot, 8-inch brew peddler formally known as Mark Carlson was Big Bird for grown-ups as he sauntered through the stands at Mesa's Hohokam Park, beer bottles and peanut bags clipped to his T-shirt on retractable cords.

Temperatures were in the 80s as the Chicago Cubs hosted the Arizona Diamondbacks for a much-anticipated spring training matchup, and spectators flocked to Carlson's side for a warm greeting, a \$6 can of "reasonably cold beer" and one of 10,000 trading cards with Carlson's photo and vital stats — he pours and throws peanuts with his right, except when he's doing it behind his back.

The Minnetonka, Minn., window cleaner said Hohokam's open-air seating gives it a leg up on the 55,000-seat Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome in Minneapolis, where he typically works about 40 games a year.

"This is what baseball's all about — outside, under the sun, it's a beautiful day. We don't have many days like this in Minnesota, and then we go inside for a baseball game," he said.

Spectators routinely ask for a trading card along with their beer, and one Cubs fan who's become a regular of Carlson's, Donato Bellino of Addison, Ill., places his order by waving a 3½-by-2½-foot plastic sign with an a photo of Carlson and the message, "WANTED: Mark the Beer Guy."

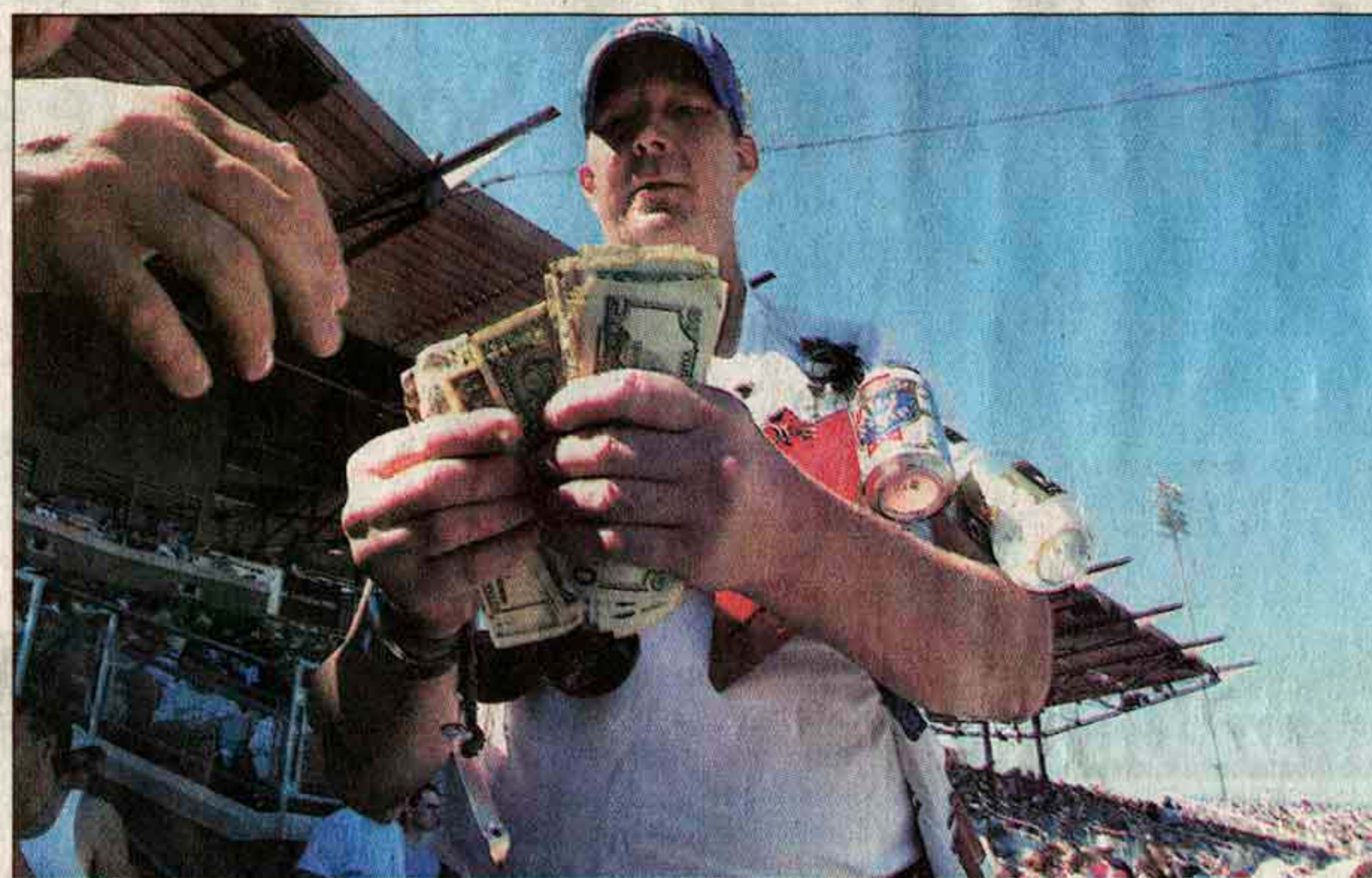
"Career highlights" listed on the back of Carlson's card include two Super Bowls, a World Series, a Stanley Cup and a heavyweight championship fight. But his longest-running gig is 11 years spent working Cactus League spring training in the Valley, mostly at Cubs games.

Carlson, 40, started out selling peanuts at Minnesota Twins games when he was 15. His trading cards were inspired by those put out by Wally the Bearman, the elder statesman of Metrodome



PHOTOS BY TIM HACKER, TRIBUNE

GO LONG: Mark Carlson throws a bag of peanuts to a baseball fan Friday at Hohokam Park in Mesa during a Diamondbacks-Cubs game.



PLAYING HURT: Carlson counts change back to a customer. Carlson, who broke his left hand in November, uses a harness to lift buckets of beer around the ballpark.

beer vendors.

Carlson said Wally is a

household name in Minnesota, "like Clorox or Budweiser," and his own cards play better in Arizona

MORE ONLINE

For more information about Mark the Beer Guy, visit www.markthebeerguy.com

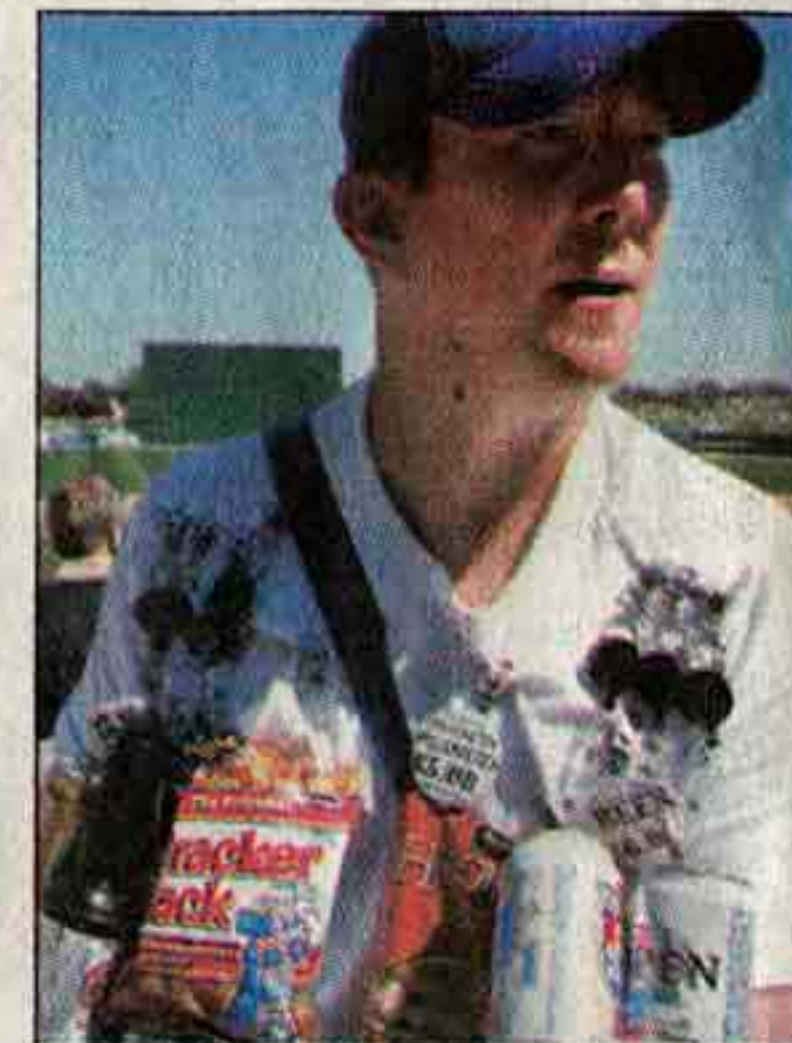
because Minnesotans assume they're knockoffs of Wally's.

Carlson insists his cards are actually a vast improvement, with a new photo and text every year: "Wally's really not very creative."

Mark the Beer Guy may not get a whole lot of respect in his hometown, and he's still trying to break past a seniority-run system into the Cubs' home, Wrigley Field.

But in Mesa, he's king. He's going to sing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" Monday when the Cubs play the White Sox, and he's inspiration to "the Beer Boy."

David Destefano, 19, is an aspiring sportswriter putting himself through Mesa



MAINSTAY: Carlson has been selling beer at spring training games since 1994.

Community College by selling concessions at Hohokam.

"For me, as the Beer Boy, I look up to him as the No. 1 beer man, he said."

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