

Ben Fallin

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Let's go to the New Orleans Arena in downtown New Orleans. A professional basketball game is underway between the Los Angeles Lakers and the hometown New Orleans Pelicans. The game is neck-and-neck, and as a timeout is called in the fourth quarter, an animated graphic appears on the video board. Who do you suppose produced this animated graphic? Would you believe, a young man from Kansas? It's today's Kansas Profile.

Ben Fallin is a motion graphics designer for the New Orleans Pelicans of the National Basketball Association. His job is to produce and direct the eye-catching video graphics which appear on the big screens during professional basketball games.

Ben is a native of Louisiana, but his family moved to Iowa and later to Kansas where his parents are on the faculty of Kansas State University. Ben is a sports fan. He played sports while growing up, although he broke his wrist on the first day of eighth grade basketball tryouts which put a crimp in his young playing days.

Ben went on to K-State. He also enjoyed the outdoors. Ben's roommates came from rural Kansas, communities such as Lindsborg, Smith Center, and Hoxie, population 1,207 people. Now, that's rural.

During his undergraduate career, Ben got a professional internship with a digital video production company in Houston. This company was producing videos for the George Bush Presidential Library, for example. While at the company, Ben saw a friend who was working on video animation. "That looks cool," Ben said. "How do you do that?"

His friend showed him the basics of animated video production and Ben went on from there. He researched the techniques of production and found he enjoyed it. When it was time for another internship, he applied online and got an internship with none other than the Tampa Bay Rays. It was his first direct involvement with professional sports.

Ben came back to K-State and worked on his skills, developing this specialty and getting degrees in business and electronic media

Ben's career took him to the Under Armour company in Baltimore and the LA Angels Single A affiliate in California. In August 2013, he accepted a position with the NBA's New Orleans Pelicans, which had previously been the Charlotte Hornets. Ben's job is to be a motion graphics designer.

In practice, this means he designs and creates animations which show on the video boards during the games. These may be short, simple videos or longer features about the team or sponsors.

"When the game stops and graphics are running on the board, I direct the show," Ben said.

What is the key to being a good designer of these electronic productions? "It's training your eye to make sure it's just right," Ben said. "We want to make sure it's perfect across the board so that the fan experience is the best possible. We want the fans to enjoy their experience and come back for more."

In the larger arenas where professional teams play, there are several video outlets. In other words, in addition to a large HD board, there are standard video boards, oncourt

displays, and others. This takes a lot of work, because the animation needs to be adjusted to fit the various venues. There is even a type of animation where the image appears to hop from one screen to the next.

This unique talent has made it possible for a young man from Kansas to have direct contact with professional athletes and others. Since the Pelicans share a training table with the New Orleans Saints, Ben gets to see football players like Drew Brees and Darren Sproles. At Tampa Bay, he worked with Evan Longoria. He's also encountered celebrities such as Hulk Hogan, Dierks Bentley, and Vanilla Ice. Wow.

It's time to leave the New Orleans Arena, where the LA Lakers are in a battle with the New Orleans Pelicans. And when the game action stops, the video animation starts. We commend Ben Fallin for making a difference by developing his skills in this unique niche of electronic communications. He does a very professional job, which means that we might say that this young Kansan has gone pro.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.