

INSIDE+ COLOR BURN: NEW GOLD
WING COLORS FOR 2014

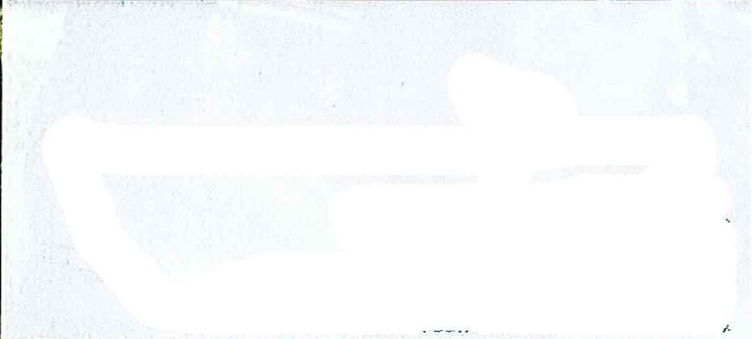


WING WORLD

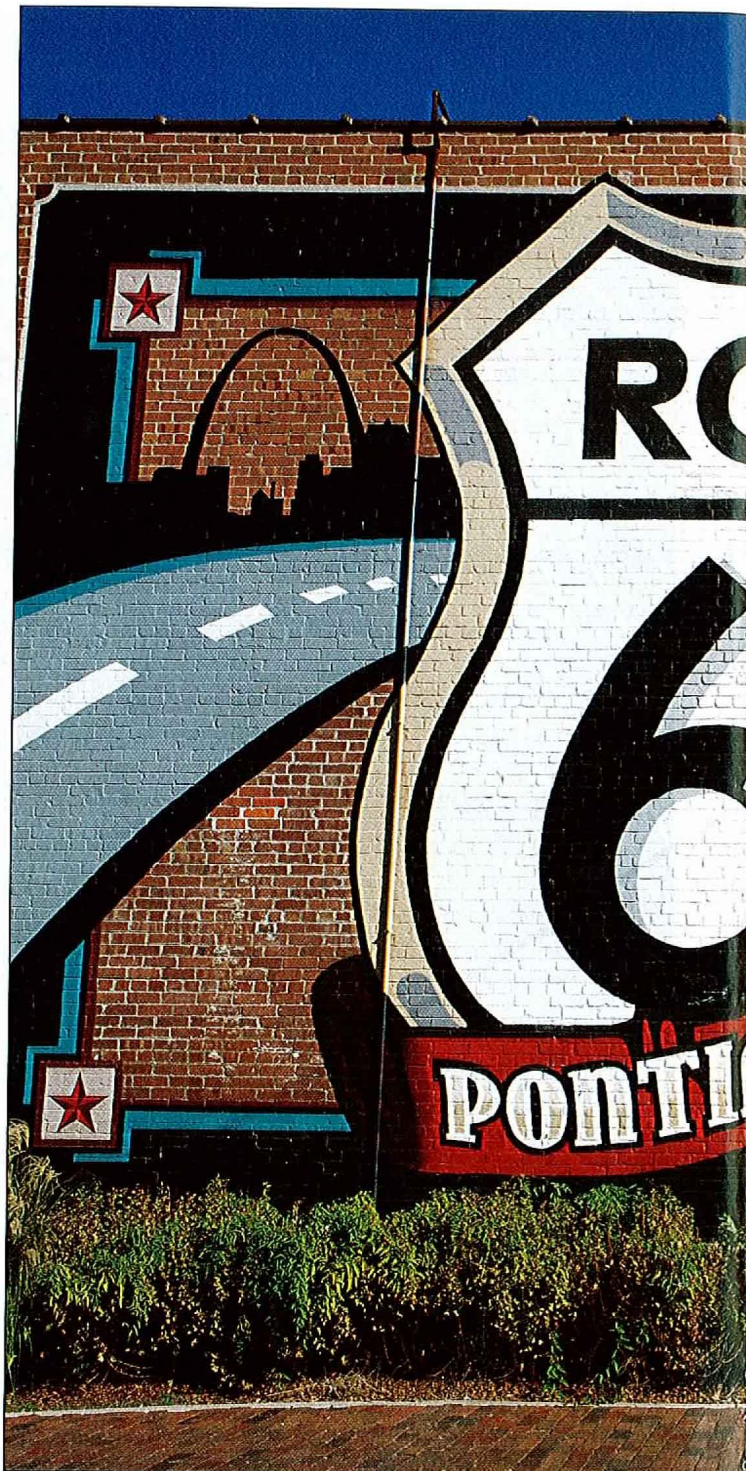


STAYING POWER

THE PHELPS AND THEIR
REFUSAL TO GIVE UP



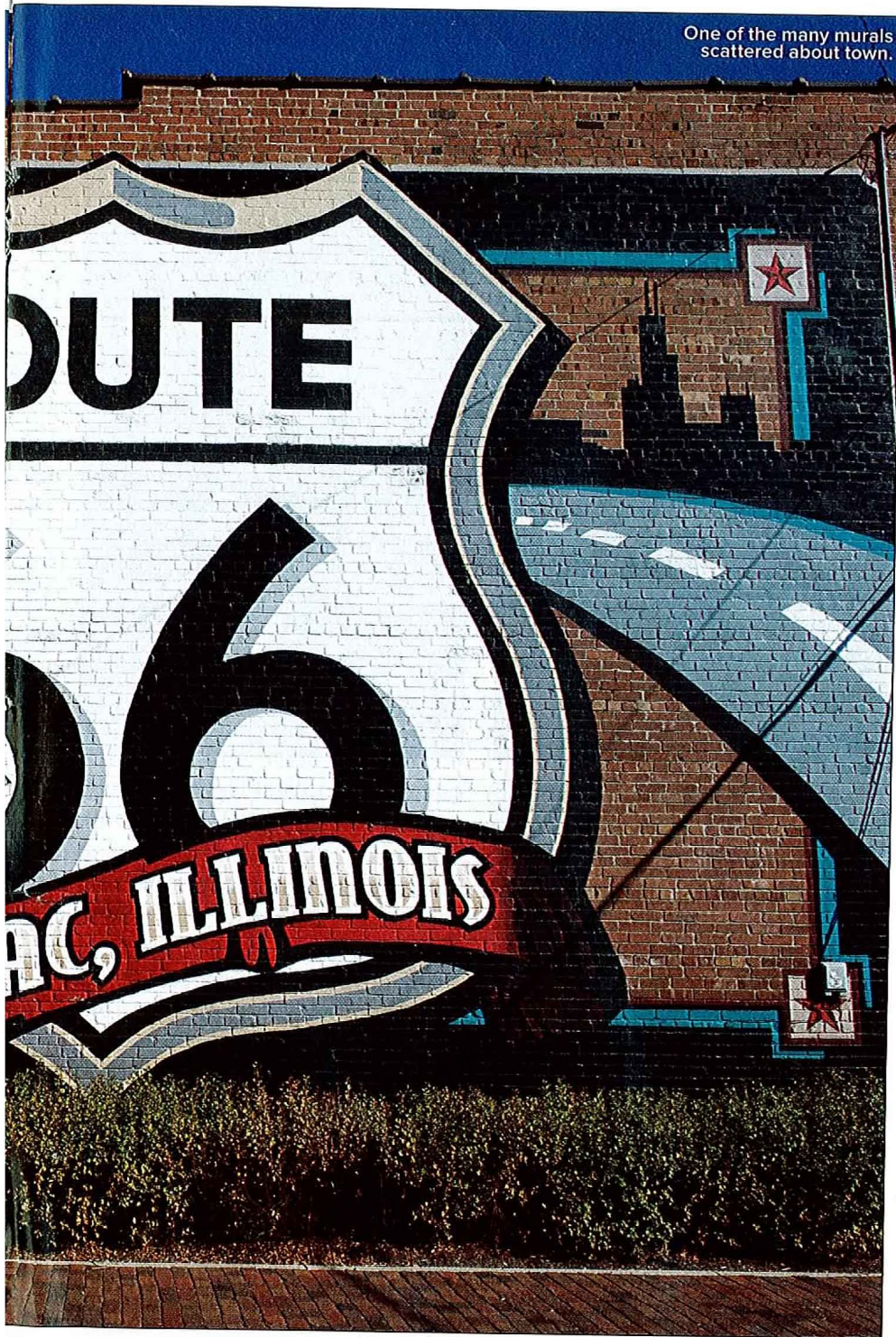
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PONTIAC, ILLINOIS

Route 66's spiritual home

One of the many murals scattered about town.



BY KEVIN WHIPPS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CARL SCHULTZ

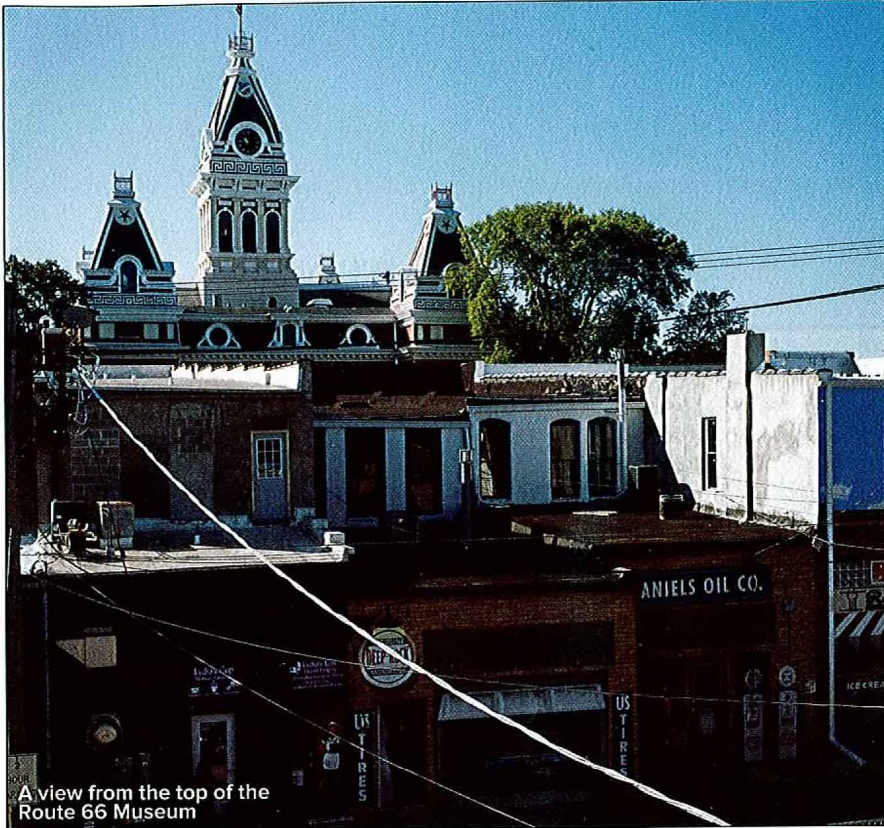
As I wrote about in “The Midwest Tour Begins — Stage 1: St. Louis to Chicago” on page 030, photographer Carl Schultz and I were on the first step of a road trip from St. Louis to Minneapolis by way of Chicago and Madison. After taking a wrong turn, we realized that to get to Route 66 we would need to make an unscheduled stop in a little town named Pontiac, Ill. It was supposed to be just a quick way to get to the Mother Road, and instead, it turned out to be an amazing little spot that’s worth a detour.

A TOWN AND A ROAD

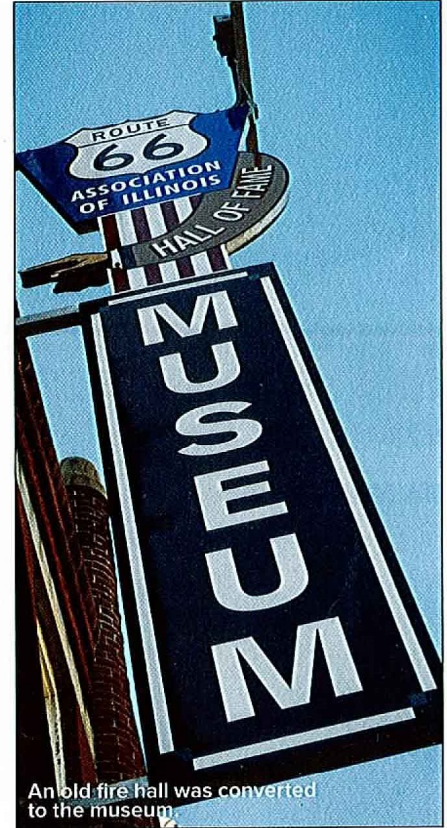
Route 66 was built in 1926 and would run from Chicago, Ill. to Santa Monica, Calif. across 2,448 miles. It was an important step in the modernization of the country, and would help pave the way to making Americans the road-trip loving people that we are today. Along the way it would pass through many small towns, including Pontiac, Ill.

As of the American census of 2000, just under 12,000 people live in the Pontiac area, making it a small town in every sense of the phrase — but it certainly has its share of history. For example, President Abraham Lincoln visited the town a few times during the 1840s and 1850s, something that’s memorialized on the historical markers found littered throughout the city. But there’s more to the town than just a presidential visit, and that’s all about Route 66.





A view from the top of the Route 66 Museum



An old fire hall was converted to the museum.

A REST STOP TURNED TOUR

Carl and I arrived in town to accomplish two things: get some pictures of Route 66, and go to the bathroom. Our rental car was loaded with gear and we had a hard deadline to meet to get to Chicago, so we didn't expect much out of this little stop. But as we got closer to the downtown area, we started seeing lots and lots of older cars. First a GTO roared by us, the exhaust putting out a throaty sound that perks the ears of all car guys. Then it was another GTO, followed by a Bonneville. What had we stumbled into?

As it turns out, we happened to be in town on a Sunday morning during a Pontiac-only car show. Once we parked, we wandered around Livingston County Courthouse where we saw nothing but cars lined up from end to end. There were easily 100 Pontiacs around town, and there was a lot for us to do. That's when we decided it was best that we take a moment and soak it all in.

You know that scene in *Back to the Future* when Marty is sitting on a park bench with his girlfriend and a person hands them a flyer to save the clock tower? The center of Pontiac reminded me a lot of that. There's the Livingston County Courthouse, which doesn't look anything like Hill Valley, Calif., but does have some similar features. The courthouse, like the fictional setting, is surrounded by two-story buildings with little shops at their base, all teeming with people doing their morning purchases. Pontiac gave us the impression that it was the type of place where your barber knows all the good gossip, the grocery store attendants know you by name and the people are always friendly. We'd find out that was true later in our journey.

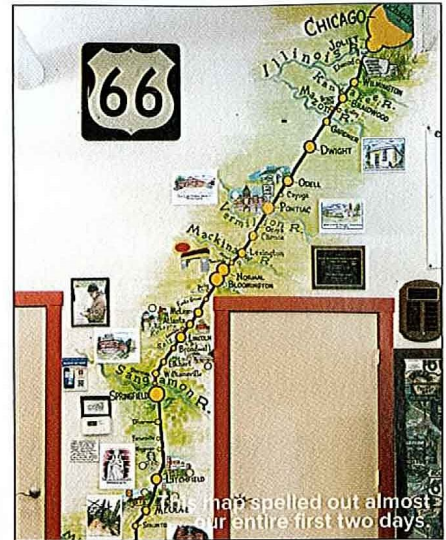
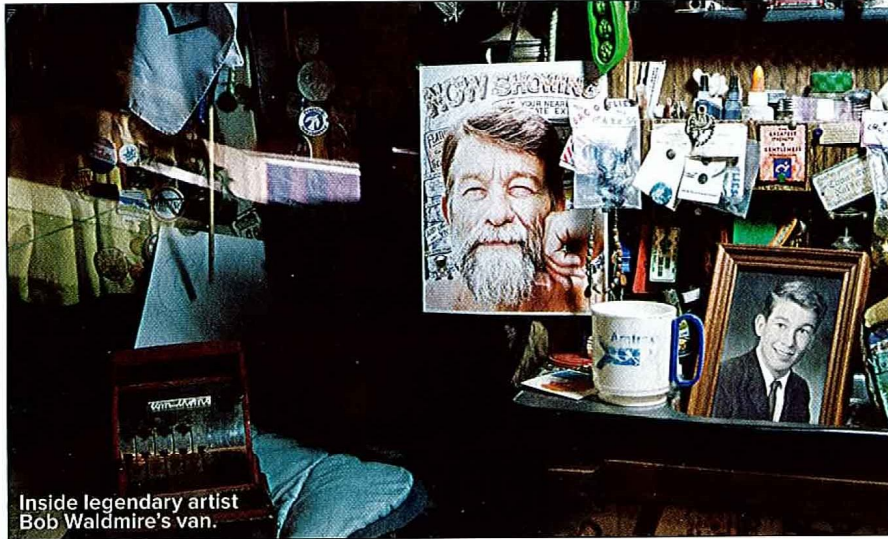
THE ILLINOIS ROUTE 66 ASSOCIATION HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM

After wandering around the car show for a bit and taking pictures, we found

ourselves on West Howard Street, right in front of the Illinois Route 66 Association Hall of Fame and Museum (il66assoc.org/attraction/route-66-association-hall-fame-museum). It's housed in an old fire hall, and packed three-stories tall with memorabilia from all across the Mother Road. With cameras in hand, Carl and I stepped inside to see what we could find out.

The ground floor of the museum is where most of the action is, as there are lots of touristy things to check out and purchase. There's the bus and van owned by Route 66 artist (and legend) Bob Waldmire, both of which are worth a wander around (and in, with the bus) just for the history. There are cases filled with photos, artifacts and history about Route 66, and little books that you can buy on the subject as well. But that's just where things start. There are still two more floors.

Head up the stairs and you're



shown little slices of life from bygone eras. There's a couch, radio and newspaper from the 1940s, where the topic of the day was WWII. Antique washing machines and sinks are up there too, as well as other artifacts. It's a nice slice of life to check out for those who haven't experienced it first hand, or even those who have but don't quite remember all the details.

There's more to be had in here as well. Lots of paintings and artwork adorn the walls on the second and third floors, with some even in what appear to be former jail cells. The intricate woodwork exposed under the roof is also great to see, completely untouched. We spent a good amount of time in the building, and it feels like we could've seen more.

BIG TIME

After leaving the museum, we set off to head towards our car and take some pictures of the show and the many murals that adorn the city. There are 24 of those mammoth paintings that dot around Main Street, and they're just beautiful to look at. On our path back, we see a big Greyhound bus unload its last passenger, and, giving it no thought,

we wandered past. That's when a fit man in a blue polo shirt and khakis stopped us.

"Hello, visitors! What brings you to our fine city today?" he says with a big smile. That's when I explained what we were doing — I was the editor in chief of *Wing*

PONTIAC IS THE TYPE OF DESTINATION THAT YOU DON'T NECESSARILY PUT ON YOUR GPS, BUT ONE THAT YOU STUMBLE ACROSS ACCIDENTALLY.

World magazine, Carl was my photographer and we had stumbled into town on our way to Chicago. "Well that's great!" he responded enthusiastically. "Let me introduce myself. I'm Robert Russell, and I'm the mayor of Pontiac." He thrust out his hand and gave me a hearty handshake.

As it turns out, Mayor Russell greets every person he can who walks into town, most of whom arrive by bus as did the group on the Greyhound we'd seen exiting shortly prior. His goal is to put a face on the town, one that's friendly and polite. He accomplished that in spades with us, and after ten minutes on the sidewalk talking to the man about his town, Carl and I knew we had to go. It was unfortunate, because

I felt like there was a lot more we could find out about the town from such a prominent insider, but the Mayor was kind enough to give us his card so we could follow up later. I would've never guessed that we'd meet a politician on this trip, and yet, here we were.

THE ROAD HOME

After spending a few hours in town, we loaded back up into the car and pointed our way north towards Chicago. The topic of conversation turned to Pontiac, and what a great little town it was — a fantastic spot to stop and check out the sites, and a fun place to be. In fact, we talked about the city for most of our drive back.

Pontiac is the type of destination that you don't necessarily put on your GPS, but one that you stumble across accidentally. Then, after wandering around and seeing the sites, you realize that it's exactly the type of spot that you should make a destination because it is that fun to visit. Yes, it's a small town with not as much to offer as its brother, the Windy City, but Pontiac sure does have a great story to tell. **WW**