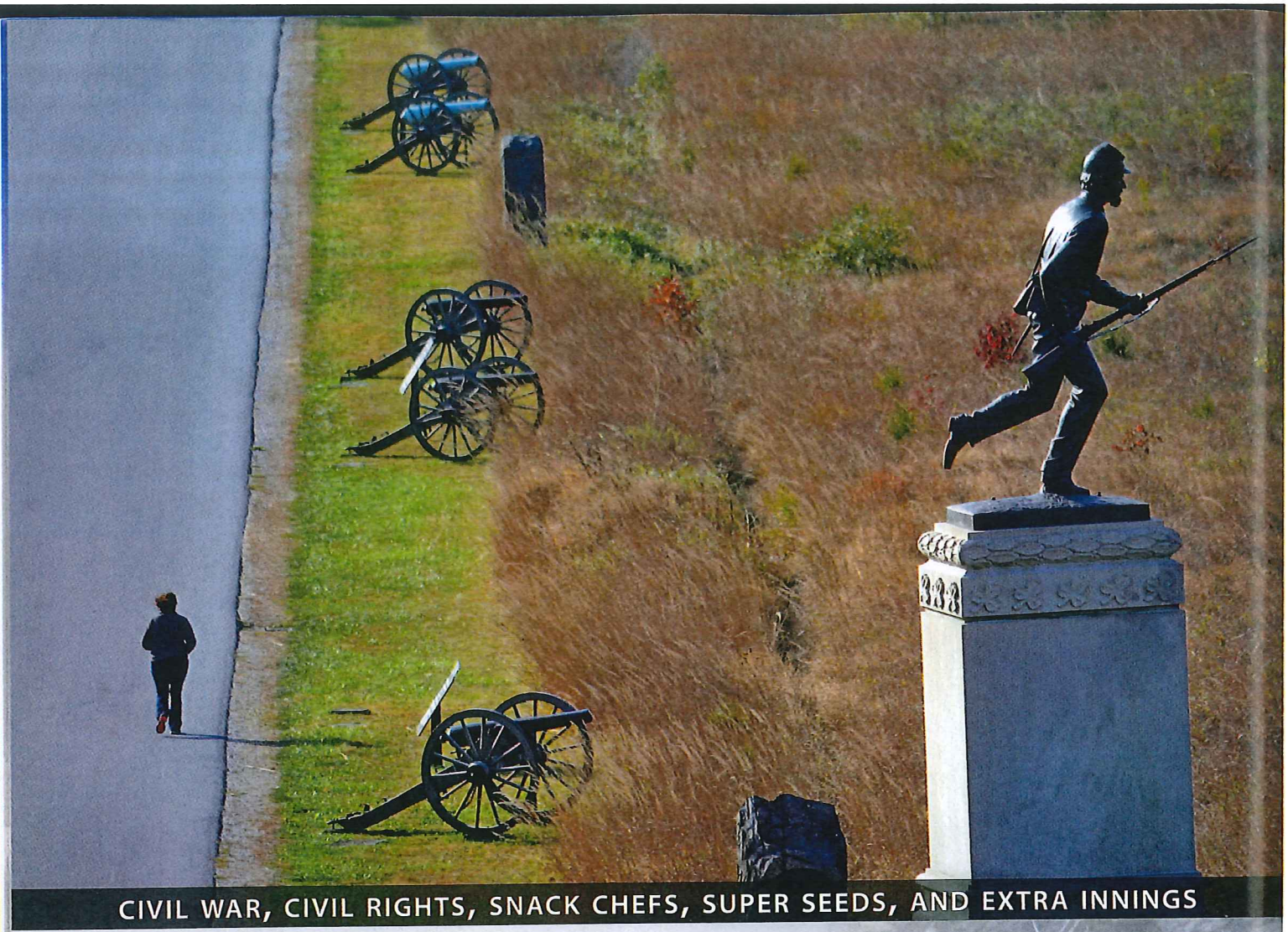
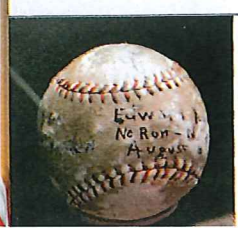
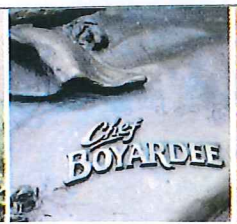


CIVIL WAR, CIVIL RIGHTS, SNACK CHEFS, SUPER SEEDS, AND EXTRA INNINGS

FIFTEEN ALONG US 15

• BY **THOMAS ARTHUR REPP**








In early July of 1863, two bullets met in midair during the Battle of Gettysburg.

The collision occurred south of town, atop Culp's Hill—a piece of land hotly contested during the three-day Civil War engagement. Federal troops under the command of Major General Henry Slocum were holding the high ground when they were charged, at dusk, by Rebel forces commanded by Lieutenant General Richard Ewell. In a moment lost to the written record, an unknown soldier in blue exchanged fire with an unknown soldier in gray. The minié balls shot from their respective muskets struck each other—and fused into one fiery lump of lead.

Those bullets are today displayed inside the Gettysburg Museum of the American Civil War at Gettysburg National Military Park. Ensconced behind glass, competing for attention with a Read pattern shell from a Confederate three-inch Ordnance Rifle—and four of the 3,500 cannonballs fired on Fort Sumter—they're easy to overlook, and nigh unrecognizable as two projectiles melded into one. Yet travelers who spy them and reflect upon their amalgamation may find in their mixture an apt metaphor for the road outside. Only a few thousand feet to the west of the Gettysburg Visitor Center, the business loop of US Highway 15 slips through the park, and that road is a mash-up of North and South, too.

US 15 traces its roots to the Civil War. It's an early highway—one of the original numbered routes designated in 1926—but it owes its existence to a much older path, and one specifically utilized during the War Between the States. "In large part, US 15 was built around the Old Carolina Road," says Barry Atchison, docent of the Graffiti House in Brandy Station, Virginia, "and the Carolina Road was a very important transportation route." Janson Cox, former director of the South Carolina Cotton Museum, agrees. "The road was the reason Civil War battles occurred where they did," he says. "The troops marched up and down that road, and that road was placed where it was because it divided two parts of the country."

Agriculture was always part of the division: The sprawling tobacco and cotton plantations of the South stood in stark contrast to the smaller farmsteads and increasingly industrialized cities of the North. Slavery was abolished at the end of the Civil War, but true equality for African Americans wasn't won before the Civil Rights Movement—a struggle that also played out along US Highway 15. It began with the courage of sixteen-year-old Barbara Rose Johns, a black student in Prince Edward County, Virginia, who staged a walk-out at Farmville's Robert Russa Moton High School in 1951 and set a template for peaceful protest. It continued later, on Franklin Street through Chapel Hill, North Carolina—a celebrated section of US 15 that earned the attention of Martin Luther King Jr.

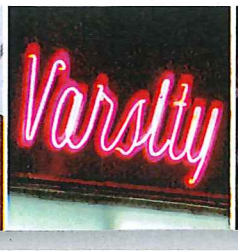
Perseverance and resiliency are characteristic of US 15, even when the contest entails nothing more than a game. The rivalry between the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill Tar Heels and Duke University Blue Devils was fueled by US 15. In 1939, Little League Baseball was inaugurated off the route at Williamsport, Pennsylvania. By that time, US 15 was evolving toward its present form. In 1941, its path through northern Pennsylvania was moved from the east side of the Susquehanna River to the west—a major revision that marked the first of many. Truncations, cutoffs, straightenings, reroutings, and lane expansions have since altered much of US 15, but the road endures. Near Tioga, Pennsylvania, the old road has even been drowned: An early alignment dribbles defiantly into the Tioga Reservoir, determined yellow stripe still visible to motorists crossing the concrete bridge overhead.

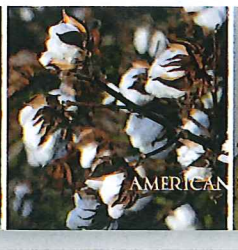
In the following pages, we showcase fifteen sites along US 15 that define the highway for today's travelers. Some are locations rich in the history of the Civil War; others recount the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement. A few speak to the rise and fall of the cotton industry or salute the national sport that is American baseball. Heroes abound in the landscape, and lingering spirits make their presence known—a US president, a French saint, and an Italian chef who spent his life selling canned pasta products under the phonetic name *Boyardee.* Together, they paint a portrait that at its cheeriest becomes something of a period keepsake—a nostalgic item of the sort sold inside The Old Lucketts Store of northern Virginia. At its most somber, it embraces the flavor of a fused artifact inside a Gettysburg display case: essential, unambiguous, immutable, sacred—proving by its existence that history has long been shaped by a clash of forces met on the American road.

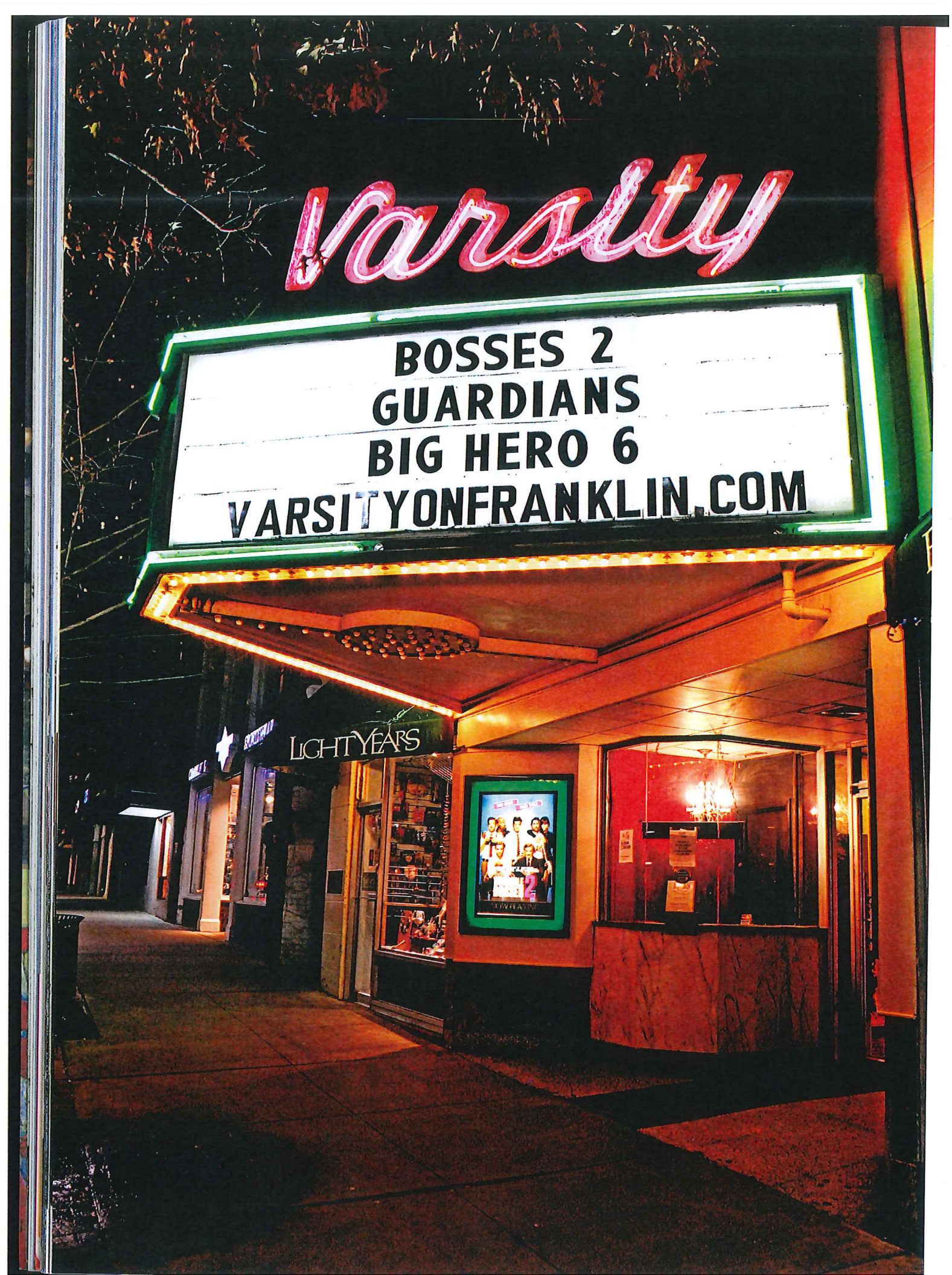
FIFTEEN ON US 15: ❶ World of Little League Museum; ❷ Clyde Peeling's Reptiland; ❸ Statue of Chef Boyardee; ❹ Gettysburg National Military Park; ❺ Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes; ❻ National Museum of Civil War Medicine; ❼ The Old Lucketts Store; ❽ Graffiti House; ❾ Baby Jim's Snack Bar; ❿ James Madison's Montpelier; ⓫ Robert Russa Moton Museum; ⓬ Durham Bulls Athletic Park; ⓭ Varsity Theatre; ⓮ Coker Farms National Historic Landmark; ⓯ South Carolina Cotton Museum










Varsity
BOSSES 2
GUARDIANS
BIG HERO 6
VARSITYONFRANKLIN.COM
LIGHTYEARS

Varsity Theatre

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

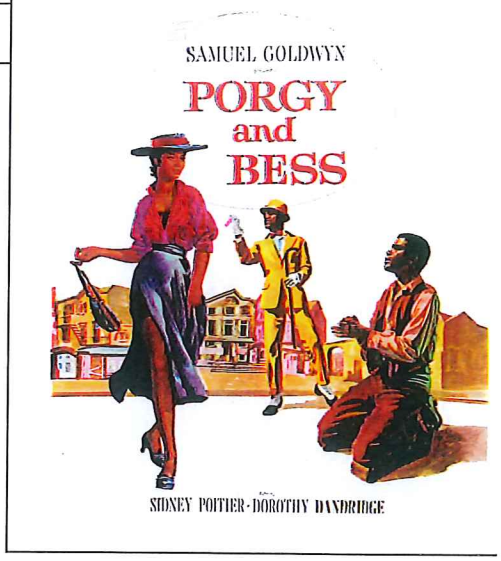
Sidney Poitier didn't want to star in the 1959 film adaptation of *Porgy and Bess*. Neither did Dorothy Dandridge or Pearl Bailey. All believed that any movie based on the 1935 George Gershwin dialect opera would perpetuate racial stereotypes that African Americans were struggling to overcome. But friends convinced Poitier that defying producer Samuel Goldwyn was professional suicide, and Dandridge and Bailey acquiesced when it became clear Poitier was on board...and, ironically, the finished film added strength to the Civil Rights Movement.

Those in the know can still hear the hum of the demonstrators, under the neon marquee of the Varsity Theatre in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. During the first days of 1961, that marquee illuminated a movement that might never have come to pass had not *Porgy* played at the nearby Carolina Theatre. Because the movie boasted an all-black cast, many African Americans were eager to see it. And when management at the Carolina refused to suspend its whites-only policy for screenings, the Carolina became a target for protestors who also marched on the whites-only Varsity.

"Ten pickets began parading past the theater carrying placards reading 'All-Negro Cast, but in Chapel Hill All-White Audiences,' 'Support Us—Don't Attend the Movie,' and 'We Like to Go to Movies, Too,'" the *United Press International* wrote from the scene. By the second night, reports confirmed that the organized participants were picketing by turns in half-hour shifts and the protests, if not the picture houses, had been successfully integrated. "Several white students and a few professors from the University of North Carolina located here joined the Negroes in the picket line" noted the papers of the demonstrations that rocked the college town.

Indeed, it was progressive sensibilities on campus that made Chapel Hill fertile ground for the Civil Rights Movement. In 1960, sit-ins at the town's Colonial Drugstore and protests at the Long Meadow Dairy Bar, Bus Station Grill, and Village Pharmacy captured the interest of Martin Luther King, Jr. who flew into Raleigh-Durham Airport on May 8, 1960, and spoke to a crowd gathered inside Hargraves Center. "You are demonstrating a magnificent act," King said in that speech. "You are not seeking to put stores that practice discrimination out of business. You are seeking to put justice *in* business...." During the years that followed, Franklin Street—the thoroughfare that carries US Highway 15 through Chapel Hill—became an avenue that saw peaceful protests almost daily.

Sources say police chief Bill Blake kept the neighborhood calm by instituting a policy of nonviolence inspired by his readings of Mahatma Gandhi. And the protests worked.



In December of 1961, the Varsity implemented a full desegregation policy. Today, it remains in business, although the Carolina Theatre is closed, earning points for its classic look, its penchant for art films, and its place in civil rights history. And Sidney Poitier is still in the picture, too. In 1964, he became the first African American to win an Academy Award, and in 2009, he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Varsity Theatre • 123 East Franklin Street • Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514 • (919) 967-8665 • varsityonfranklin.com

FIFTEEN MORE ALONG 15

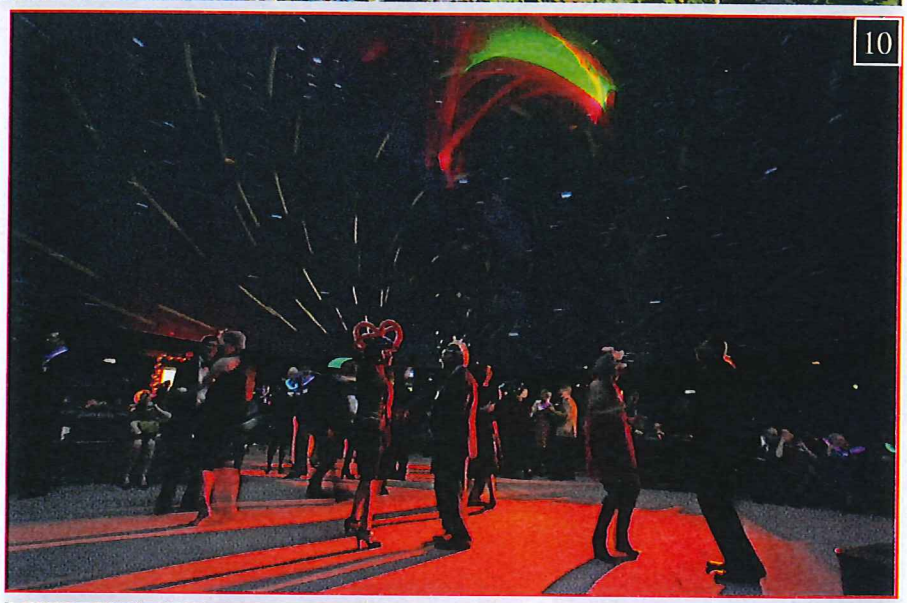
ONE MORE LAP DOWN THE OLD CAROLINA ROAD AND BEYOND

• BY JILLIAN GURNEY

waters. Local lore claims that for years following the wreck, picnickers would dive down and ring the submerged engine's bell.

MOREHEAD PLANETARIUM
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

⑩ The Morehead Planetarium and Science Center is a gas—a nebulous, cosmic gas—that thrills students of the stars at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Opened in 1949, it was the first planetarium constructed in the South, an astral experiment financed by philanthropist John Motley Morehead III and designed with input from Harvard University astronomer Harlow Shapley. Both men were Scorpios, which may account for the stinging tenor of their dialogue. Harlow called North Carolinians "the most astronomically ignorant people in all America." Morehead declared Shapley an "ignoramus." But somehow, the meeting of the two resulted in one of the nation's great science centers. The planetarium's first program, "Let There Be Light," brought understanding to dark skies, and it has enlightened visitors ever since.



FIRST RESPONDERS MEMORIAL
Pittsboro, North Carolina

⑪ Pittsboro, North Carolina, isn't anywhere near New York City, but like all of America, it was shaken by the terrorist attack of 9/11. Thirteen years later, Pittsboro unveiled its own First Responders Memorial. The tribute employs a scarred nineteen-foot I-beam plucked from the rubble of the World Trade Center's North Tower and donated to Pittsboro by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The scrap stands on end like a rusting sundial, raised precisely nine degrees and eleven minutes, and pointing toward Ground Zero.