Players, managers, even owners, have come and gone over the past 37 years, but for fans of the Philadelphia Phillies, there has been one constant since 1971 -- Harry Kalas behind the mike.

Kalas' signature baritone is the soundtrack of the summer for fans from the Poconos to the Jersey/Delaware shoreline.

Some have suggested lately that Kalas has lost something off his fastball.

And sure, he may mix up a count here and there, or go into a premature home run call on a ball that barely makes the warning track.

But Kalas remains a Philly-area treasure who will always be welcomed into the homes of thousands of Phillies fans.

Kalas was in the Lehigh Valley on Wednesday as part of the Phillies Caravan at DeSales University, an event held to benefit the newly formed IronPigs Charities.

When the dignitaries, including manager Charlie Manuel, and players Brett Myers and Geoff Jenkins, were introduced at the dinner, Kalas received the biggest ovation.

And that's probably because Kalas doing Phillies games is one of the things we've come to count on in a time when guys who were once our heroes (Michael Vick, Roger Clemens etc.) tend to let us down, or ultimately disappoint us before exiting the local stage (Allen Iverson, Terrell Owens, etc.).

"Unlike players, broadcasters tend to stay with their teams without moving around very much," he said. "You had Jack Buck in St. Louis, Bob Prince in Pittsburgh, my friend Vinny [Scully] who's still with the Dodgers. You get tied to a city, tied to a team, and you come to like it."

It's clear the Philly faithful are wild about Harry.

Earlier in the day, Kalas did a one-hour Q&A inside DeSales' Billera Hall.

The room was filled with people ranging in age from 6 to 70 who were eager to hear the sound of the summer in the middle of January.

Kalas didn't disappoint, even re-creating his call on Mike Schmidt's 500th home run for someone who was born after the historic 1987 blast in Pittsburgh.
And when he mentioned the IronPigs, Kalas said how wonderful it was for the Lehigh Valley to have a team again and predicted an International League title for the new team.

Kalas is also optimistic about the future of the team he works for.

But whether it be an extra-inning win on a Ryan Howard home run or a heartbreaking defeat on a Brad Lidge blown save, Phillies fans don't want to hear the news from anyone but Kalas.

"I feel blessed to have been with the Phillies since the very first year of Veterans Stadium in 1971," he said in a one-on-one interview between events. "To see the crowd here at DeSales, and see people of all ages come out, was special. It's obvious people here love their baseball."

Kalas is as synonymous with the Phillies as Phil Rizzuto and Mel Allen were with the Yankees and is as identified with the city as much as the Liberty Bell, Rocky, Geno's and Pat's Steaks and the 700-level boo-birds at the Vet.

Richie Ashburn, Kalas' broadcast partner for 27 years until his sudden death in New York in 1997, was a beloved icon and Kalas has since picked up the torch from his good friend "Whitey."

"There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about Whitey and that memory always leaves me with a smile on my face," Kalas said. "From the time we started working together, we understood one another. He told me from the start that if he had nothing pertinent to say, he wasn't going to say anything. He was just a joy to work with.

"He not only brought a wealth of baseball knowledge to the broadcast booth, but also a tremendous sense of humor. He was just fun to be around."

And their chemistry was evident to those watching and listening at home.

Since Ashburn's passing, Kalas has had numerous partners in the booth. He misses getting the chance to do more innings with Larry Andersen, who has Ashburn's quirky sense of humor. He also misses Scott Graham, who was unceremoniously released by the organization before the 2007 season.

"These things happen in baseball," Kalas said. "I try to stay away from the internal affairs and inter-office dealings and try to just come to the park and call the game."

And you get the feeling that Kalas without a ballgame to do would be like Joe Paterno without a football team to coach or Rush Limbaugh without a liberal to rip.

To him, 162 games -- closer to 190 if you include spring training -- are hardly a grind.

"It's what I love to do," he said. "It's what I wanted to do since I was in high school. I'm lucky to have had the chance to do something I love to do.

"It keeps you away from family a lot, but I still enjoy it. As long as I have my health, I want to keep doing it."

Kalas will be back here doing TV for the Phillies-IronPigs exhibition game on March 30 and there's no better way for Coca-Cola Park to be christened than with Kalas bellowing "That ball's outta here!" on the first Pigs poke over the fence.