

THE BEST SEATS IN THE HOUSE

Ever wonder who gets to sit in the TV camera's view behind home plate at Citizens Bank Park? So do we.

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It's a question that puzzles Phillies fans from Abington to Aston to Ashburn Alley.

Who are those people?

More specifically, who are these people whose tickets put them directly behind home plate at Citizens Bank Park — and squarely in the frame of TV cameras for all of Phillies Nation to see?

What probably isn't a surprise: The people with the best seats of all — in the ultra-pricy Diamond Club section at CBP — include folks who are as regarded in their respective realms as Ryan Howard and Roy Halladay are in theirs.

For instance, anyone who regularly tunes into Phillies broadcasts has probably seen Thomas Kline and Shanin Specter, partners in the Center City law firm

that bears their names. Kline is the guy who successfully sued SEPTA for \$51 million on behalf of a 4-year-old boy whose right foot severed in 1996 by a faulty escalator at the Cecil B. Moore

Avenue stop of the Broad Street Subway. Kline also won almost \$30 million for the families of those who died in the 2000 collapse of Pier 34 on the Delaware River.



Phil Martelli
Head basketball coach,
Saint Joseph's University

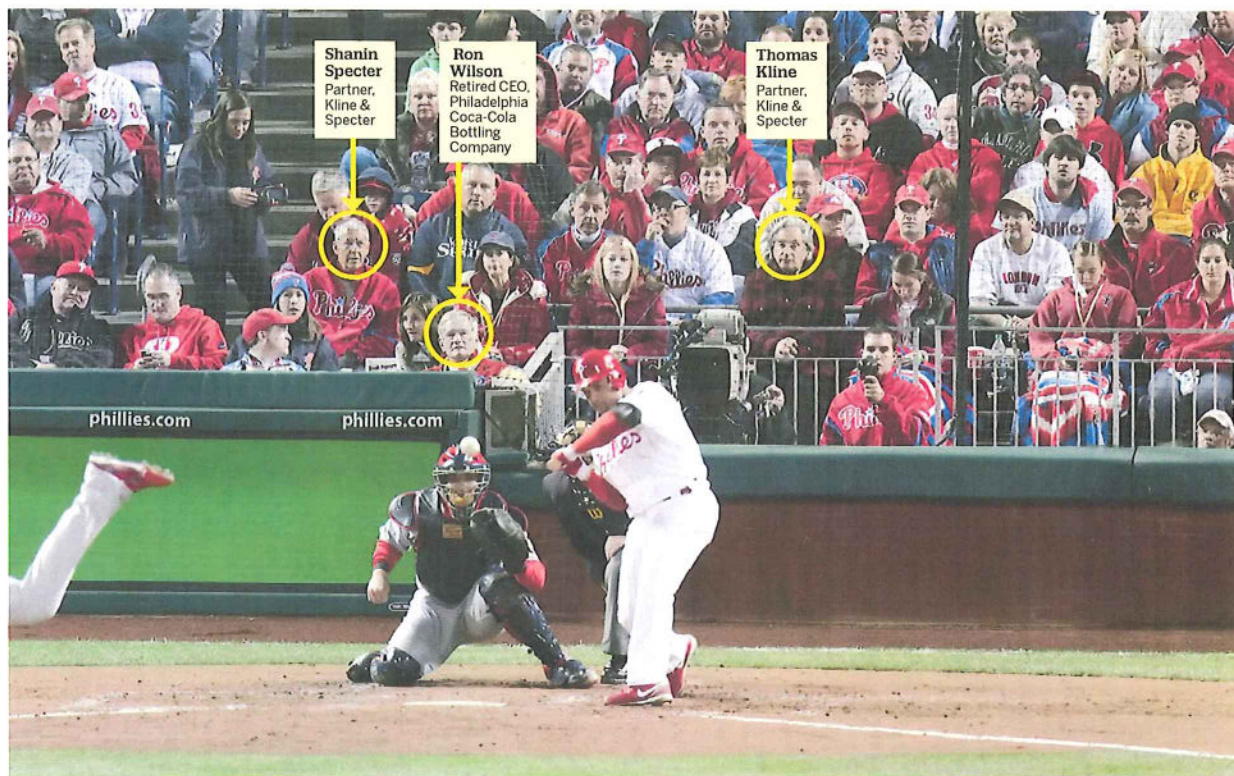
Specter; of course, is the high-profile, politically connected son of former U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter (who occasionally avails himself of one of the firm's four tickets). Specter once won \$200 million against Ford for a case in which a pickup truck's parking brake disengaged, killing a 3-year-old boy.

A die-hard Philly sports fan who can also be found courtside at 76ers games, Kline makes no attempts to hide his delight at his CBP perch. "Seat 4, Section D Row 3 is the best seat in the universe for watching baseball," he bragged during a matchup be-

tween the Phillies and the San Diego Padres. "It is obviously one of the great experiences in sports."

Ron Wilson is one of the few people who can dispute Kline's contention about the primacy of his location. That's because the seats owned by the retired president and chief operating officer of the Philadelphia Coca-Cola Bottling Company are in the Diamond Club's first row. For years, Wilson, 62, has also sat on the boards of some of the region's biggest and most well-known nonprofit organizations, but his

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greatest fame still stems from the copious amount of face time he receives attending Phillies games. "All of the years I ran Coke in this town, and all the charity work I've done ... and that's how I'm known," said Wilson with a smile. "You're the guy who sits behind home plate!"

Another civic heavy hitter with primo seats is James Korman, president of Korman Residential, a residential leasing company. During a regular-season game, you might not be able to distinguish him from any of the other ticketholders seated

behind home plate. But come October, he's hard to miss. "I'm the one who paints my face red," he said.

Other Diamond Club habitués whose names you may know include John Middleton, one of the Phillies' co-owners (he is so publicity-averse, he made sure his seats are not in TV-camera range) and, not surprisingly, Dan Fitzpatrick, president and CEO of Citizens Bank in Pennsylvania. Other familiar faces in the Diamond Club: Judith Selde-neck, chairwoman and CEO of Diversified Search; and Comcast bigwigs Brian Roberts and Steven Burke.

But you don't have to be a pub-

lic or semi-public figure to sit with the high rollers (being able to afford the price of admission is the only requirement). Tickets are also claimed by such people as members of the O'Hara Family, which owns the popular Uncle Bill's Pancake House outlets in several Jersey Shore towns, the Williams Family, owners of car dealerships in northeastern Maryland, and Terry Williams (no relation), a venture capitalist.

The latter is usually joined by his girlfriend, Marlene Corso, who appears to serve as the mother hen for those in her section: During a game when temperatures flirted with 100 de-

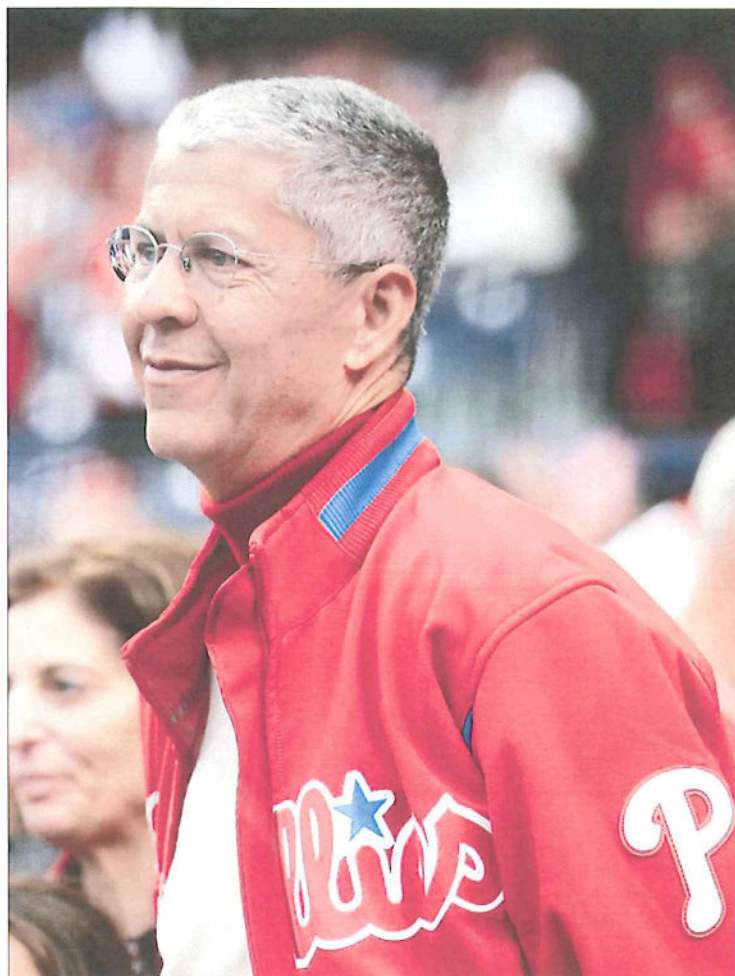
grees, Corso regularly spritzed friends in the section with water from a plastic bottle. Among her fellow Diamond Clubbers, Corso is known as "The Screamer," thanks to her willingness to loudly share her feelings about the action unfolding in front of her.

Of course, those who own the seats often give their tickets to employees, clients, prospective clients and friends. That means at any given game, those within view of the TV camera might not be anyone particularly notable. That should change during the postseason, offered Specter. "What tends to happen," he explained, "is the 'glitterati' comes out for the playoffs. That's when

the occupants of the seats tend to change fairly dramatically."

Beyond having an umpire's-eye-view of balls and strikes, Diamond Club members get a few perks for their \$230-per-seat fee (available only as part of full 81-game season-ticket packages). So that they never have to miss a pitch, ticketholders are offered food and beverage service at their seats (snacks and drinks — hard and soft — are included in the price of a Diamond Club season ticket). They also have access to storage lockers situated in a small room behind the visit-

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Shanin Specter takes in an NLDS game against the Cardinals in the Diamond Club.

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ing team's dugout that's outfitted with a flat-screen TV and a refrigerated case.

According to those who hold the premium seats, though, the best part of sitting there is the sense of camaraderie that has

developed through the years. "This is like a clubhouse, everybody knows everybody," offered Wilson, the onetime Coke honcho. "That's what makes it special."

Those who sit in the Diamond Club may be people of means, but that doesn't mean they cop

an attitude, said section usher Sheila Sacco. "People say to me, 'Oh, you're with rich people. Are they rude?' " said Sacco. "No. They're not snobs. They're the nicest people in the world. I have friends here. It's one big, happy family."



Terry Williams and lady friend Marlene Corso get comfortable in the seats behind home plate. STEVEN M. FALK / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



With seats like this, no wonder Ron Wilson (right) and his neighbor's son, Alec, are smiling.

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Attorney Tom Kline enjoys the view with his son, Zac, and Zac's friend Blair Baker.

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