

HOLLISTER, MISSOURI (November 19, 2009)

Joshua Heston is a writer, photographer, designer — and founder of State of the Ozarks.net (a website publication dedicated to the celebration of all things Ozarkian).

The funny thing? He's not even from these hills.

"I know it's funny," explains Heston, "I was born and raised in the middle of Illinois, near Peoria. I think a lot of folks wonder about my connection to the Ozarks and why I did what I did."

Heston grew up on a small acreage in rural Peoria County, near Chillicothe. His father, Don Heston, was an engineer for Caterpillar, his mother, Donny (Danner) Heston, a homemaker.

"I was born in Illinois," says Heston, "but much of my family is from Southern Iowa, close to the Missouri border. My mama kept hold of her roots, whether it was gardening or cooking or our dialect, even when urban folks around Peoria would look at us funny."

"I really connected with my mom's side of the family — growing things in the garden, knowing the trees and plants of the timber, appreciating the music."

"What I didn't know was I was essentially inheriting a hillbilly culture. We visited Branson in 1998 and the Ozarks really felt like home. I knew then it was a place I wanted to be associated with."

Heston went through the graphic arts program at Illinois Central College in East Peoria, finishing in December of 2000. He was asked to return the following summer, this time as faculty. Heston would serve as adjunct faculty for the graphic arts program until 2008.

"I had been doing more and more freelance design work since 2004 and much of my work focused on Branson artists," he continues. "The idea of a website dedicated to Ozark culture and history came to me and I knew it was something I really wanted to do. I really believed in the idea and, fortunately, folks here in the Ozarks believe in it too."

"At the time, though, it was just another project for my design studio."

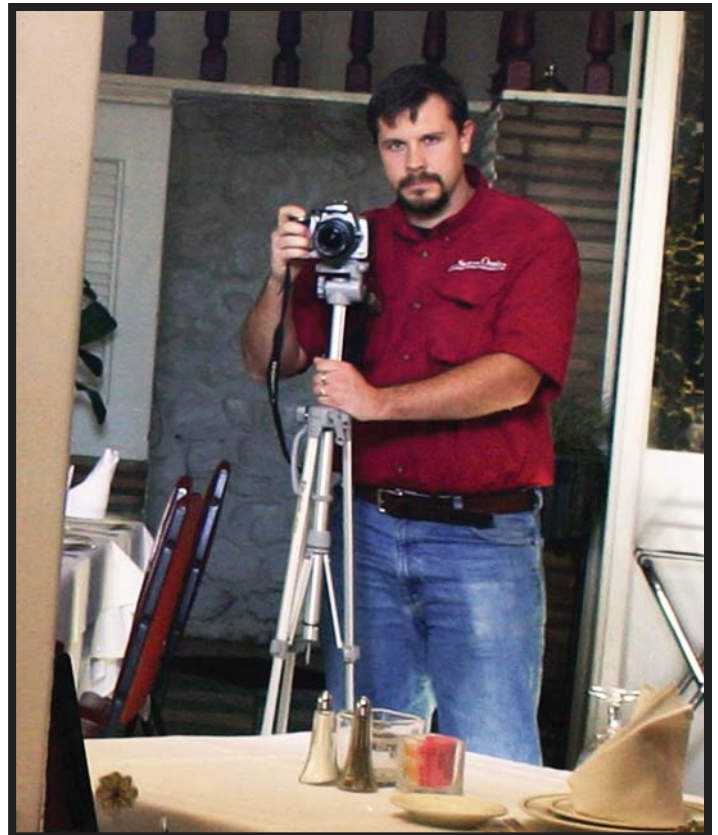
StateoftheOzarks.net went online September 17, 2007. In two years, the site's popularity soared. Its pages have been views tens of thousands of times and subscriptions to StateoftheOzarks Weekly, a free email associated with the site, rose rapidly.

"I don't think this type of experience could have happened elsewhere," the 31-year old writer notes. "Folks here have such a sense of regional identity. Music — particularly southern gospel and bluegrass — is a big part of the culture. Also, my Christian faith has been important to me since I was a kid and it's a big part of the Ozarks. I think it makes the mountains a very warm, special place."

Today, StateoftheOzarks is a corporation, based in Hollister, Missouri. Heston partnered with Ozark native Dale Grubaugh in 2009 to form the company.

"I really didn't know the site would come to define my career," Heston says, "It was just a project I felt was important."

"However," he warns, "If we don't begin celebrating and preserving our unique American cultures, those cultures will be forgotten. What we have in our backyards is just too rich in heritage to allow that to happen."



Joshua Heston photographing the Riverside Inn, Ozark, MO (NOVEMBER 19, 2009)

Dedicated to the celebration and preservation of Ozark culture and heritage.

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