

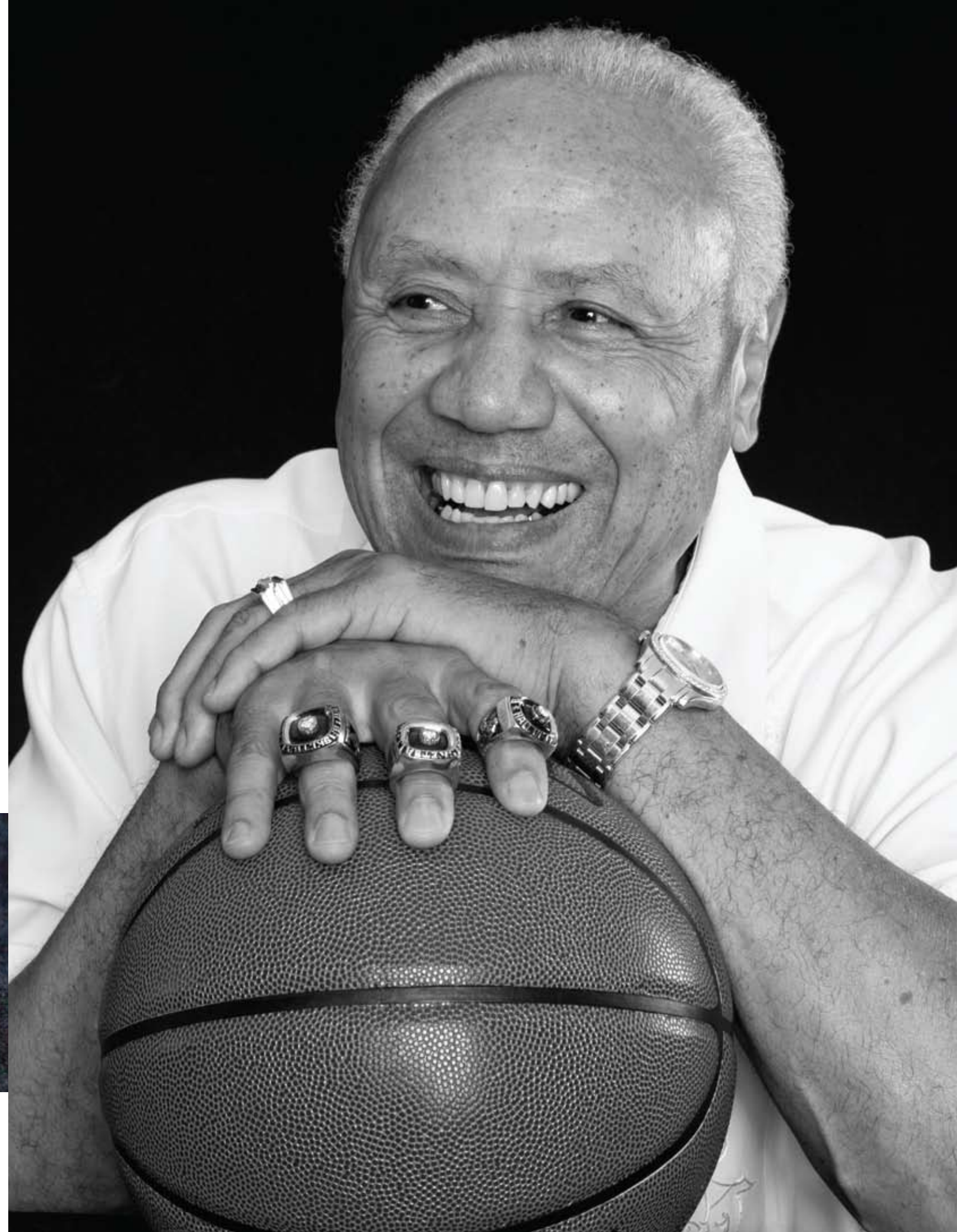
MY FAVORITE THINGS

NBA HALL OF FAMER AND MEDINA RESIDENT LENNY WILKENS REFLECTS ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS RINGS.

When it comes to rings, Lenny Wilkens has his fair share. In fact, the Medina-based NBA Hall of Fame coach and player has so many honorary rings—earned from playing in multiple All-Star games, coaching Olympic basketball teams, his record-making inductions into the Hall of Fame and everything in between—that he says he's not even sure of the exact number. But while Wilkens values these symbols of his achievements and the stories they carry, it is the Lenny Wilkens Foundation, which Wilkens founded to deliver healthcare and education services to young people, that currently makes him the proudest. Here, he tells the stories behind his success.

"I DO THINK ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RINGS, what they stand for and the history they carry. Of course, the new ring feels particularly special because I'm the only one who has been inducted three times. [Last August, Wilkens made history when he became the first person inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame as a player, a coach and an Olympian]. * "But all of the rings feel like a huge achievement for someone who never had aspirations for professional basketball. I was a Brooklyn baseball fan, and when it came to basketball I never got picked first, so I became determined to learn this game and become proficient in it. * "The rings came later in my career, but you could say the 'symbols' began with trophies for youth games and the like, and in college they gave us watches: a Bulova imprinted with a National Invitational Tournament medallion and a Longines embedded with two small diamonds. The first real ring was for making the NBA All-Star team in 1963, and then several more followed. Those were all great, but the rings that are most unique to me are the ones from the Hall of Fame, the Olympics, the 50 Greatest Players and the 1979 Sonics championship. It's true there are now many rings, but they are all beautiful and

significant, and I don't take them for granted. It's a honor when you are singled out for any achievement. * "Above all of the rings, though, my favorite piece of jewelry is the pendant my wife gave me early on in our relationship. I wore it on the court until the rules changed and I was no longer allowed to. Now I wear it every day and it reminds me of our 47 years of marriage and what an incredible human being she is. * "In general, I appreciate that I have these symbols—this jewelry—that reminds me of my accomplishments. But when we achieve certain things we then have to understand about giving back. I often tell people that life is a gift. Do as much as you can and have fun with it. And that includes not only wanting to be successful, but wanting to be involved in the world around you. My foundation, for instance, is very special to me; it is something I do because I want to, and now it has become a symbol of my achievements. * "For me, sports became a way of life, but it also became a stepping stone, a way of growing and developing as a human being. My mother taught me to let honesty, integrity and dignity define my character. Even more than all the rings, those three things are the real symbols you carry with you all the time." ■



OPPOSITE: LENNY WILKENS, WEARING SOME OF HIS MANY RINGS, AND (ABOVE) THE THREE HE RECEIVED FROM THE BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME. PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE SIZER.