

From burgers, running and seminary to Ozark Catholic

written by Alesia Schaefer |



TONTITOWN — The path is not always straight, and no one understands that like Chase Feltner.

As the new hire for the dean of athletics at Ozark Catholic Academy in Tontitown, Feltner feels his circuitous path has brought him to the place he needs to be.

Most people associate the Feltner name with either running or burgers. And both would be true.

Feltner can lay claim to both, just at different times in his life.

As a high school student, Feltner ran mid-distance races and broke state and regional records, earning him the All-American title in track at Russellville High School in 2002. In 2003, he was awarded the highly regarded Gatorade Track Player of the Year.

His success also carried over to the classroom, where he graduated with a 4.0 grade point. Combined, it was his athleticism and academics that got the attention of the legendary Coach John McDonald at the University of Arkansas, who offered Feltner and his twin brother scholarships to run.

“Being successful in the classroom was important to me,” Feltner said, “and focusing on my studies and what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to make sure I could be successful and prepare for my future.”

The running genes were legitimate. Their father, John, was a running phenom and was inducted into the Arkansas Hall of Fame more than 20 years ago. Chase Feltner would later be inducted in 2021, an honor he holds dear as he and his dad are currently the only father-son duo.

Despite his love for running, after three semesters, he and his brother, Travis, both decided to hang up their running cleats and focus on school.

“It came down to the joy that I had experienced running, it just wasn’t there anymore,” Feltner said. “I had lived out a dream to wear the U of A jersey and everything was there, but something was missing, and that was really the first time in life that I was experiencing that emptiness, but I didn’t know what that was.”

Running had been his life, but something was missing.

Following graduating in 2007 with a degree in marketing management and a minor in finance and communications, Feltner moved to Los Angeles, worked in a restaurant on Sunset Strip across from the famous Mel’s Diner, often frequented by the stars. The following year, he moved to Panama City Beach, Fla., and worked as a bartender while his brother, Travis, worked as a weather reporter.

With these experiences under their belt, both brothers moved back home to Fayetteville the following year and opened the iconic “Feltner Brothers” that has been a part of the local scene for 16 years. Not veering too far off the path, one could say there were “burgers in their blood.” Their grandfather had opened the original “Feltner’s Whataburger” in Russellville in 1967. Still open today, the restaurant continues under their aunt.

“Our restaurants were not affiliated, but we knew we could be successful with the name,” he said. “We were so young, and we didn’t want to work for anyone else,” Feltner said with a laugh of their 2009 restaurant debut in Fayetteville.

Still, the demands of keeping a flourishing business afloat took their toll on both brothers. A second location, interestingly, was opened in Tontitown in the summer of 2018 before OCA opened its doors.

“But we had to keep an eye on what’s important,” the 40-year-old said.

As the family grew and changed, so did their dreams for the business. Feltner and his brother took different paths, but their younger brother, Grant, stepped in as a new owner of the business. When the pandemic hit in 2020, it was a struggle to keep both establishments, so the Tontitown location closed.

"We spent time refocusing our efforts with the rebranding and refreshing of the business in Fayetteville to keep it successful," he said.

All the while, that still small voice had gotten louder for Feltner.

In 2023, he entered the seminary with the Diocese of Little Rock and continued discerning what a life of holiness looked like for him. That led him a year later to join the Trappist monks at St. Joseph Abbey, an old dairy farm turned monastery, in Massachusetts, where Feltner said it was isolated and the cold winters appealed to him.

But the voice continued to call, and Feltner said it brought him back to Arkansas to be with his family.

"The Lord was asking me to come home, and there was a peace in making the decision," Feltner said. "I have never felt more free in making that decision."

Feltner, who attends both Fayetteville parishes of St. Thomas Aquinas and St Joseph, reflects on how his resume has been a primer for this new position, which includes overseeing all athletic programs and coaches.

"I told the Lord, after 18 years of doing the same thing, and then from 2023-2025 bouncing around, he better have something good for me," he said with a laugh. "When I learned that the dean of athletics position was open, I felt really fortunate."

"I feel the Lord has prepared me in all the aspects — faith, business, sports and working with youth — to be better prepared to do this job," Feltner said. "I find myself sitting in the chapel at OCA and see the Lord's humor. I have to pinch myself in this moment. This school has a mission and vision to help get the kids to heaven and to help them with who God intends them to be. We get a chance to develop who they are as athletes and individuals, and I am excited to be a part of that mission."