

Unveiling of HOF Inductee Park a Tremendous Success

An estimated 100 Hall of Famers and 1,000 guests attended the unveiling of Chicago 16 Inch Softball Hall of Fame in Forest Park, Sunday July 19th. Every person was expecting to see the beautiful park and plaque display, but at the ceremony after reading the Governor's proclamation that July 19th would be 16" Softball Day in Illinois, State Senator of the 5th District Rickey Hendon stunned the crowd announcing the State would commit \$500,000 for the phase two museum. The crowd and the shocked HOF Board went wild.

" All I could do was say to my fellow Board members, did he say what I think he said?" Co-founder Al Maag who thought the ceremony was going as planned with MC, George Bliss and fellow HOF leaders Ray Topps, Art Lurie, Tony Reibel and Ron Kubicki with Forest Park's Mayor Calderone and Park Board president, Cathleen McDermott, until the bombshell. "There is no doubt we are very comfortable in raising the funds with sponsors and donations, but now we can start building process for the museum immediately. We have a great story to tell."

After the ribbon cutting lead by Fritz Zimmermann the Board members and guests like Howie Fagan, Bobbie Blackstone, Floyd Glover, Rich Melman, Bud Boy and Larry Piekarz, they went to all 8 displays and unveiled them all. The guests then swarmed the area to see the displays and take photos. They were not the only ones...Channel's 9 and 7 aired short stories on the evening broadcasts. A variety of newspapers were presenting including the Trib.

Jim Holan was quoted as saying, " Our Dad would be very proud". Rich Melman noted how pleased he was with quality and class of the finished project. The park looked spectacular with easy to read plaques. 3D Exhibit collected memorabilia, and Dave Hibel noted "folks were teary eyed looking the donated items. Bobbie Lamont's jacket was proudly worn by his family.

There were more surprises to come in HOF and Celebrity game...Ed Zolna made an appearance and he was added to the 1st pitch list, along with Larry Piekarz, Bob Ancona, and Maag. Rich Melman's plans for a great game played by over 60 people was better than expected again. With hundreds of people watching on a beautiful day Robbie Gould, Bears kicker ripped a single his first time up...not bad for someone who has not played 16" before. Not to be undone, Mike North and Bob Sirott lead the media stars.

Melman's Northside strategy of D and speed paid off and won 17-6 over his South friends. Art Lurie, event coordinator was beaming..."what a great day for softball and we will plan on doing this game every year at the same time."

Maag, " Ray did a great job along with Ron and Art was the grand artist painting a picture as the event leader. We had a great PR team (Henson Assocaites)that garnered us unprecedented coverage starting with the Wall Street Journal to radio and TV coverage. We are so lucky that the City of Forest Park has embraced the project and we have started to get sponsors like Vienna, March, Lettuce Entertain You's Rich Melman, Kodak and Affy Tapple..as the week unfolds I hope to announce even more.

Today thanks to Fritz, we made a difference for our game and so many people, the smiles and comments were priceless"