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Contacts: Kathleen Henson
(630) 315-2960
Kathleen@hensonconsulting.com

Beth Kleineman
(630) 315-2966
beth@hensonconsulting.com

**THE BEST SOFTBALL PLAYERS OF ALL TIME TO CELEBRATE “CHICAGO’S GAME”
AT UNVEILING OF THE 16-INCH SOFTBALL HALL-OF-FAME INDUCTEE PARK**

*Hundreds Will Converge on Forest Park for July 19th Ribbon Cutting
Ceremony and Celebrity Game*

CHICAGO – July 19, 2009 – Chicago is known for its deep dish pizza, Chicago-style hot dogs, skyscrapers, and our own distinctive brand of politics. Yet, many don’t realize that it is also known for one of the most beloved amateur sports of all time – 16-Inch Softball – which originated in the Windy City more than 120 years ago. One organization is working to raise softball’s profile and provide a special place to honor the players, coaches, teams and supporters that have been instrumental in building 16-inch softball into a worldwide game since it was first played in 1887.

The Chicago 16-Inch Softball Hall of Fame, which was founded online in 1996, will unveil its new *Inductee Park* on Sunday, July 19, 2009. Located in Station Park (at the corner of Des Plaines and Harrison) in Forest Park, IL, The *16-Inch Softball Hall of Fame Inductee Park* is situated on a 50’ x 50’ piece of land. At its center is a large sculpture of a 16-inch softball and interspersed throughout the Park is eight individual displays that feature 340 plaques that highlight the names and achievements of the Hall of Fame’s inductees. The site is surrounded by four oversized bats on each corner of the monument footprint.

“The unveiling of *Inductee Park* is a very important milestone toward our ultimate goal of opening a 16-Inch Softball Hall of Fame Museum,” said Al Maag, co-founder of the Chicago 16-Inch Softball Hall of Fame. “We have been hoping and working for 10 years for this day. It’s a priceless moment that we now have a place to honor our inductees, past, present and future, as well as educate the public on their contributions to the game and highlighting its tremendous impact on our culture.”

A Rich History

Dating back to Thanksgiving Day 1887, the game of softball originated at the Farragut Boat Club in Chicago when Yale and Harvard grads were killing time waiting for the tickertape results of the annual football game between the rivals. Instead of sitting around, they wrapped up a boxing glove, making a “soft” ball and then played baseball in the gym with a broom. They enjoyed the activity so much they began to formalize rules and the game became an indoor sport for years.

In the early 1900’s, 16-inch softball was a perfect game for Chicago's small neighborhood ball fields and cinder-covered school playgrounds since the ball didn't travel as far as the smaller balls. Also, the absence of gloves benefited everyone in the tough economic times of the 1930s. Teams had only to chip in ten cents per man for a new ball, and women took to the sport because it was less dangerous than baseball. The sport was also appealing due to its being organized by family, community and ethnic background at first, then sponsored by the companies its players worked for, a tradition that is still largely followed today.

“Chicago softball is played barehanded with gnarled fingers and knuckles that tell stories of errors and victories in games long past,” continued Maag. “Over the years, most Chicagoans have played the game in school, at a picnic, or in an organized league. As thousands of Chicagoans migrated to other parts of the country, so too has the game and tradition of 16-inch softball.”

The Vision of Inductee Park

Inductee Park will be formally dedicated during a ribbon cutting ceremony at 11:00 a.m. on July 19th, 2009. The ceremony will be attended by more than 100 members of the Chicago 16-inch Softball Hall of Fame including Fritz Zimmermann, Art Lurie, Ray Topps, Tony Reibel, Mary Pat McGuire, Bob Ancona, Ron Kubicki and Wally Filkins.

Immediately following the ribbon cutting ceremony, at 12:30 p.m., Chicago 16-Inch Softball Hall of Famer and well-known Chicago restaurateur Richard Melman will host a Northside vs. Southside Hall of Fame game that will feature both Hall inductees and celebrities to commemorate the opening of *Inductee Park*. Scheduled to participate in the game are several prominent celebrities and personalities including sports commentator Mike North, news personality Bob Sirott, Chicago Blackhawks president John McDonough and Chicago Bear Robbie Gould and former Bear Dennis McKinnon, among others.

These historic events will bring together and honor more than 300 of the greatest 16-Inch Softball players, supporters and teams of all time. The event will also serve as the formal launch of a fundraising campaign to renovate the building immediately adjacent to the *Inductee Park* to become the official Chicago 16-Inch Softball Hall of Fame Museum.

The 16-Inch Softball Hall of Fame Inductee Park cost approximately \$150,000 to design and build, and was funded through individual donations and the sale of bricks that make up the footprint of the monument park. A significant donation was from March Manufacturing, the pump designer from the Northwest suburbs. Additional supporters of the park and the ribbon cutting ceremony include great Chicago brands such as Vienna, Affy Tapple, Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises (Richard Melman), and the world famous Kodak.

"Our strategy is to align the Hall of Fame with great brands like these with various sponsorship opportunities and to encourage softball fans to also make donations, which should raise the \$400,000 in funds needed to finalize the museum," noted Maag.

Forest Park was selected as the ideal location for *Inductee Park* and the future Chicago 16-Inch Softball Hall of Fame Museum as it is in many ways the center of the game. Each year the Park District of Forest Park plays host to the *No-Glove National Tournament* which is attended by thousands of fans to crown the national champion in 16-Inch Softball each year.

"It's an honor for our village to be an integral part of this tribute to the greatest players of Chicago's great game," said Anthony Calderone, Mayor of Forest Park. "This is so wonderful because it represents an upgrade to our park program. Once the old building is renovated it will be a jewel in our park complex and is sure to become a must-see destination of 16-Inch softball enthusiasts across the country and for Chicagoland residents as well."

About the Chicago 16-Inch Softball Hall of Fame

The Chicago 16-Inch Softball Hall of Fame (HOF) was formed in 1996 to promote the great Chicago game that was born in Windy City by honoring and recognizing the sport's best players, coaches, umpires, teams and supporters. For more information, please call 630-315-2960. To donate on-line to the Hall of Fame museum and inductee park, visit www.16inchsoftballhof.com.

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