



June 23, 2016

## NEWS RELEASE

### **Springfield, MA American Legion baseball teams return to play in Gastonia after racial incident 80 years ago**

Two Springfield, MA American Legion baseball teams will play a series of games with local American Legion teams this weekend as part of a new relationship between the cities of Springfield and Gastonia begun last year. Gastonia American Legion Post 23 travelled to Springfield last year, along with City of Gastonia officials, to play a series of games there in an effort to make amends for a racial incident that a 1934 Springfield American Legion team experienced when they visited Gastonia for a tournament that year, more than 80 years ago. (see accompanying information for background on the 1934 incident)

#### **The schedule for this weekend's games are as follows:**

**Friday, June 24** at Belmont Abbey College's Alumni Field: Springfield American Legion Post 21 and Post 420 will play at 5:30 p.m. and 8 p.m. respectively against the Gaston Braves, jointly sponsored by Belmont American Legion Post 144 and Stanley Post 266.

**Saturday, June 25** at Sims Legion Park in Gastonia: Springfield Post 21 and Post 420 will play games at 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. respectively against Cherryville Post 100 teams.

**Sunday, June 26** at Sims Legion Park in Gastonia: Springfield Post 420 and Post 21 will play at 11 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. against the Gastonia Post 23 teams. Between the two games, at 1:00 p.m., there will be a short program recognizing the two cities' new friendship.

All games are free admission and the public is encouraged to attend.

For additional information, use the following URL to view a story on the two cities baseball exchange by Gaston Gazette reporter, Richard Walker, who attended the Springfield games last year and reports regularly on Gaston County American Legion baseball:

<http://www.gastongazette.com/sports/20160620/springfield-mass-teams-come-to-gastonia-for-return-trip-after-last-years-visit>



## **From Gastonia to Springfield 2015: A Journey of Healing, Friendship and Goodwill**

### **What was the 2015 Gastonia to Springfield trip all about?**

A 2015 article in the Springfield, MA daily newspaper, *The Republican*, explained very well the history of the 1934 racial incident in Gastonia:

“The name ‘Gastonia’ has been anathema to Greater Springfield residents ever since a 1934 incident at an American Legion sectional [baseball] tournament. When Gastonia officials, hosts of the tournament, found that Springfield had an African-American player-pitcher/outfielder Bunny Taliaferro – the Post 21 players were told that he would not be allowed on the field, in the team hotel or at the table of a pre-tournament banquet.

In a stand for brotherhood and against racism, Post 21’s players – 15- and 16-year olds – voted to withdraw from the tournament, giving up a chance to win a national championship. Their stand against racial segregation came 13 years before Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers broke major league baseball’s color line.”

Last year, when Gastonia Mayor John Bridgeman learned of the incident from the author of a children’s book on the incident, Richard Andersen, a professor at Springfield College, he wrote Springfield’s mayor, Domenic Sarno, a poignant letter of apology. That unsolicited, heartfelt expression of regret led to an exchange of communications, invitations, and new friendships that culminated on Father’s Day weekend, June 19-21, 2015, when Springfield hosted Gastonia’s American Legion team in a ceremonial game intended to symbolically heal the wounds of the 1934 incident, establish a new relationship between the two cities, and demonstrate the power of tolerance and goodwill. Mayor Sarno said of Gastonia’s decision to visit Springfield, “It’s not only an opportunity for renewal on the baseball field, it’s an opportunity for a teaching moment regarding civil rights.” Last year at the game in Springfield, the last surviving member of that 1934 team, 97-year-old Tony King, was guest of honor at the game and threw out the first pitch.

The Springfield American Legion teams travel to Gastonia June 24-26, 2016 for the second leg of the exchange.