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The Neighborhoods of Baseball: Art Exhibit and Events in 2013

By Tomas Benitez

What is it about baseball that has always attracted artists and inspired art? It seems like from the beginning of the game, great poets and writers from Whitman to Lardner to Kinsella have endeavored to capture the drama of the sport. Painters have treated us to renderings and images of individual heroics and team victories on pastoral green fields or neighborhood sandlots. Black and white photos of legendary players and moments, such as The Babe, Willie Mays going back on the ball, or Sandy Koufax in his furious motion; all have become more like flat, iconic sculptures in their stoic beauty and timelessness. People who have no affinity of the game will still get misty at the end of “Field of Dreams” when Kevin Costner finally has that game of catch with his dad. Although, we can also cite Tom Hank’s admonition in “A League Of Their Own “...there’s no crying in baseball!” How many of you who are “in no way big fans of the game,” still know the words.... “buy me some peanuts and cracker jack, I don’t care if we ever go back, but it’s ...” ; you know that last phrase, don’t you? Baseball has been part of our culture for well over a hundred years and art has helped foster that condition.

The true acolyte of the game understands instinctively the connection of art to the culture of baseball. It is an imperfect yet beautiful game, like art itself, and the creativity of baseball, it’s willingness to suspend time and often space, as well as serve as a popular metaphor to numerous aspects of human life, makes the game a natural for the creative mind to expand upon it’s facets and the impact of the game on our history, humanities, and indeed our culture.

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Saluting Mexican American Ballplayers in the Military

Mexican Americans have played baseball in the military since the 1930s, and maybe even before that time. Cal Poly Pomona will host an exhibit during the entire Summer of 2013 paying tribute to Mexican American men and women who played baseball and softball in the Armed Forces, especially during World War II and the Korean War. Moreover, on August 27, Cal Poly Pomona will host an all-day event that will include a luncheon, panel discussion, and First Pitch ceremony to honor these extraordinary players who defended their nation. Continued on page 2
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The exhibit will include dozens of rare photographs and other related materials highlighting the outstanding military contributions of Mexican American ball players, and their service to their country on the battlefield. A number of players saw combat during World War II in both Europe and Asia. A few served as medics. Other players served during times of peace, but were always prepared to go wherever they were needed to defend this nation.

Players who will be honored include Bob and Art Lagunas, George Peña, Carlos and Luis Uribe, Tommie Encinas, Eugene Sam Sandoval, Jess Briones, Frank Prieto, Ray Salazar, Ray Delgadillo, Charlie Sierra, Ernie Cervantes, Louis Jimenez, Frank Layvas, Ramon A. Martinez, Henry Toledo, Juanita Conchola, Manuel Hernandez, Margaret Villanueva Lambert, Richard Mendez, Cuno Barragan, Rudy Castro, Eddie Aros and David Paul Camacho.

These players were goodwill ambassadors to dozens of foreign countries around the globe, and presented themselves both off and on the field with dignity, respect, grace, and honor. They demonstrated the
Continued from page 2: best of Mexican and American cultures to the rest of the world. The Latino Baseball History Project is seeking more names, stories, and photos of Mexican Americans who played ball in the military between the 1920s and 1970s.

The exhibit will be open to the public between June 28 and Sept. 10, 2013 on the 3rd Floor of the Cal Poly Pomona Library. The special event day will be held on Aug. 27, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. For further information, please contact Dr. Richard Santillan at (626) 284-4957 or rsantillan@earthlink.net.

Cuno Barragan (first row, fourth from left) had a celebrated baseball career in Sacramento before joining the Navy and playing in 1954 for the Bluejackets at the Naval Training Station in San Diego. Cuno would go on to play professional baseball, including several distinguish seasons with the Chicago Cubs. He had a base hit off of Sandy Koufax. (Courtesy of Cuno Barragan.)

Manuel Hernandez (first row, far right) served in World War II as a medic and saw action in Germany, Belgium, and Holland. He had a illustrious baseball career in Los Angeles prior to joining the service. (Courtesy of Sergio Hernandez)

Milo Hernandez (second row, far right) is seen here in Seattle, Washington in 1944 where he trained with the infantry and special forces. He played baseball and boxed in the service. He was not sent overseas due to a brother killed in action and another brother in combat. Prior to and after World War II, he played many years of Los Angeles community and industrial baseball. (Courtesy of Sergio Hernandez.)

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**NEED A RIDE?**

Carpooling for Latino Baseball History events The road is long... and you could share it with other Latino Baseball History players! Some members of the project are interested in attending LBH events, but are unable to drive. If you know of someone who could use a ride please call them and offer - or call Pfau Library Administration at (909) 537-5102 or email archives@csusb.edu to offer to help out as an "LBH Carpool Teammate." Call or email us if you can provide a ride or if you could use a ride, and we will match you with players in the area who are traveling to the event. We will need your name, phone number, city you live in, and information on whether you would like a ride to the event or if you are willing to take someone with you when you drive to the event.
The Latino Baseball History Project is proud to announce that the publication date for the Mexican American Baseball in Orange County book is April 8, 2013. This is the third book in a series of books documenting the long and rich history of Mexican American baseball and softball from the 1890s through the early 1960s. The book includes vintage photos of teams and players from Anaheim, Santa Ana, Tustin, Garden Grove, La Palma, Los Alamitos, Stanton, Orange, Fullerton, La Habra, Cypress, Placentia, San Juan Capistrano, Westminster, Huntington Beach and San Clemente. Mexican Americans played all types of baseball and softball in Orange County including youth, high school, college, military, community and business, churches, women, transnational, semi-professional and professional. Additional photos cover other parts of California as well as nearly 20 states. For further information, please contact the Latino Baseball History Project at California State University San Bernardino.

The Eastside Athlete Club (1947-1958) was an outstanding Mexican American Fullerton City League team. Most players were from the Truslow areas of Fullerton and attended Maple Elementary School, a Mexican school, in their youth.

In this photo the Placentia Merchants played the San Luis Cubanos from Cananea, Mexico, at White Sox Field, Los Angeles, circa 1938. The Queens (kneeling) were cheerleaders. They walked around the baseball diamond before the start of the game. (Courtesy of Monica DeCasas Patterson.)

The La Habra Aces were a girls sandlot softball team that played together from 1947 until 1951. They were sponsored by E & G Avocado Company, a local packing house that also sponsored a Mexican American men's team. (Courtesy of Amelia Zuniga.)

Some ranchos sponsored baseball teams to foment worker loyalty. This is a picture of the Anapauma Team from El Modena (Orange).
On the Field Again: First Pitch Ceremonies Honor Players

By Hope Ervin-Murillo

The Latino Baseball History Project, working with Cal State University, San Bernardino and California State Polytechnic University, Pomona has organized several first pitch ceremonies since 2011 with events to honor Mexican American baseball players. The next one will be held in Pomona in the summer of 2013.

The baseball first pitch tradition started in 1910 with President William Howard Taft throwing out the first pitch on the Washington Senators’ Opening Day. The ceremonies celebrate the most honored in the community. Professor (and LBH Board Member) Richard Santillan spoke about the meaning of these ceremonies,

“It’s a very special moment for us to be in the company of these incredible, wonderful ball players and see them once again, see them throw the ball. For their family and friends who weren’t old enough to remember them on the field, it gives them a small glimpse of what these players must have been like when they were at the height of their careers, 40-50 years ago. Family members see their fathers, their grandfathers, or their grandmothers with a ball or the glove. This is something they will keep in their memories for the rest of their lives.”

The ceremonies honor the players differently than the books and photos do, by bringing them back to the field to relive their memories. Santillan described the feeling of hosting the events:

“It’s a very special way for us after all these years to publically acknowledge them, kind of like one last hurrah, one more day in the sun… That’s why these books, newsletters, exhibits, and ceremonies are here, so they can participate and be acknowledged in a way they couldn’t be years ago, when they faced so much discrimination. It’s amazing these players who faced so much discrimination are now having books written about them… it’s an opportunity to correct a social wrong, acknowledging their historical contribution to the American pastime.”

The first ceremony was arranged by the Ethnic and Women’s Studies Department at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona and was held in May 2011. It honored six players, three from the Pomona Valley and three from Los Angeles. Their names are Bob Lagunas, Tommie and Maury Encinas, Richard Peña, Al Padilla and Ignacio Felix. A photo of this ceremony is included on page 120 of the book Mexican American Baseball in the Inland Empire.

Bob Lagunas had played at Cal State LA in 1959 and 1960. When the team found out that one of the honorees had been on the team 52 years ago, they took him back to the visitor’s dugout and took a huge group photo. Current players asked him for his autograph!

Santillan explains that Cal Poly’s second ceremony, held on May 29, 2012, had some changes. Instead of selecting six players, they sent out an invite for Mexican American women who had played between the 1930s and 1950s in the areas of Los Angeles, the Inland Empire, and Orange County. Women who participated, about 19 in all, picked their own catchers. Honorees chose their daughters, granddaughters, and husbands to go onto the field and catch for them. Families shared the honor, and will share the memories. The ceremony was held before a game at the Broncos Baseball Field.

On May 5, 2012, Cal State San Bernardino’s John M. Pfau

Participants of the 66ers first pitch ceremony
**The Neighborhoods of Baseball**

In The Latino Baseball History Project, the emerging identity of an American life and the process of building community, particularly in the Mexican American barrios, have been viewed through the lens of baseball. This game is an established conduit for us to explore larger themes, and in doing so the stories, images, and experiences uncovered and finally brought to light are a treasure to be shared for the theme of The Neighborhoods of Baseball. This offers the opportunity to look at how the game has made an influence on identity and community in the emerging American landscape, plus will reflect some of the fun and oddity of baseball that has always identified the game.

(Hitting a round object with another round object is destined to yield odd tangents, quirky results, and unique art!)

In addition to the art exhibition, programming will include a conference of panels and discussions that look into some of the humanities themes to emerge from a study of the culture of baseball. Events will include a film series, a night of readings and poetry, an old timers day, and a night of comedy with music inspired by baseball to compliment the run of the exhibition. All the events will be taking place at Plaza de la Raza, located in Lincoln Park, 3540 N. Mission Road, in East Los Angeles, and additional details on each of the programs will be announced throughout the year.

A number of luminaries from the art world including artists and photographers, performers, filmmakers, writers and other creative personalities, will be joining scholars, students, old timers, academics and historians, as we all merge upon the Latino Baseball History Project’s The Neighborhoods of Baseball Art Exhibition and program of events. The seemingly different kinds of interested parties have been brought together by a common identity, we’re all just baseball fans who love the game. **Join us!**

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**On the Field Again (cont.)**

Library held a first pitch ceremony at Fiscalini Field. The ceremony started a game between the Cal State San Bernardino’s Coyotes and the CSU Dominguez Hills Toros and honored the following players from the 1930s to the 1950s: Richard Peña from Riverside, Al Vasquez from Cucamonga, Sal Valdivia from Beaumont, Amado Briones from Chino (his son, Chuck Briones, pitching in his father’s memory), Tito Cortez from Corona (his son, Richard Cortez, pitching in his father’s memory), Carlos Uribe from Corona, Al Villanueva from Claremont (his son, Al Villanueva, pitching in his father’s memory), Victor Reyes from Palm Springs, and Ernie Benzor from Riverside (his son, Ernie Benzor, pitching in his father’s memory). Most recently in San Bernardino, the Mexican American Baseball Night, held on Aug. 28, 2012, was kicked off with a dinner and lecture at the historic Mitla Café in San Bernardino. A first pitch ceremony followed at San Manuel Stadium, preceding a game between the Inland Empire 66ers and the Lancaster Jethawks. Honorees invited to pitch included: Anna Duarte, Joe Mujica, Steve Martinez, Mario Castorena, Carmen Domínguez Nevarez, Bertha Bocanegra, Armida Neri Miller, Richard and Eddie Cortez, Chuck Briones, Carlos Uribe, Maury Encinas, Tommie Encinas, Ignacio Felix, Ernie Benzor, Alice Gomez, Al Villanueva, Sal Valdivia, and Al Vasquez.
For 2013’s Women’s History Month, Pfau Library will display the *Mexican-American Women in Softball: A League of Their Own* exhibit created in Pomona by Richard Santillan and Manny Veron.

The exhibit features the roles of Latinas in baseball, everything from brides who married their baseball-playing grooms on the baseball field to photos of women’s baseball and softball teams.

Many communities and businesses began sponsoring women’s baseball and softball leagues when men were away during WWII. As in the men’s league, women’s baseball and softball were a family affair. Sisters and cousins often played on the same team, and their families came out after church on Sunday to watch them play. Baseball gave them an opportunity to use their athletic talent, a field in which they could shine.

These women faced some of the same issues as male Latino players. For instance, in the early 1940s Helen Parga played softball with the Santa Ana Queens. The team travelled to Phoenix, Ariz. for a tournament. There Parga faced segregationist attitudes: she was denied service at a restaurant. She had to wait in the living room area while her Anglo teammates ate in the dining room.

Latina players also overcame some difficulties that Latino players did not have to face. Latina players struggled with society’s definition of a “lady” as someone who was neither athletic nor competitive. These women worked hard to be accepted as the talented, beautiful, athletic ladies they were then and are today.

While we focus on the players, do not discount the women who did not play ball but who married players. They were essential members of a network that changed society. The Leagues crossed neighborhood boundaries, people from different areas met, dated, and married. The family networks created a broader community, a community that proved to be an effective political network in the civil rights movement.

The exhibit includes images of players from the North Hollywood Vixies, Orange Lyonettes, Santa Ana Queens, the Tomboys, La Habra Acres, San Fernando Bluejays, the Fullerton-Anaheim McMahan Girls, Colton Mercury Senioritas, La Jolla Kats, Las Gallinas, San Bernardino Raiderettes of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Tony’s Fiesta, the Questionettes, the Cherokees, Las Debs de Corona, Casa Blanca Busy Bees, East Los Angeles Columbianas, the Flirts, and Las Aztecas.
MARK YOUR CALENDERS - THE LBHP HAS A FULL SCHEDULE THIS SEASON!

Tuesday, Jan. 22, 2013, 6-7:30 p.m. Book Signing. Cypress Park Branch Library 1150 Cypress Ave., Los Angeles 90065. Contact: Patrick Xavier.


Saturday, Feb. 9, 2013, 2-4 p.m. Book Signing. Hacienda Heights Library 16010 La Monde St., Hacienda Heights 91745. Contact: Ryan Ricchio.

March 1-31, 2013. Latina Baseball History Exhibit. California State University San Bernardino, Pfau Library, 1st and 4th floor exhibit cases.


Neighborhoods of Baseball

Neighborhoods of Baseball: Exhibit from April 13-Aug. 4, 2013; events throughout the run of the exhibit. All will be held at Plaza de la Raza, 3540 N. Mission Road, Los Angeles, CA 90031-3135.

Saturday, April 13, 2013, 2-5 p.m., Neighborhoods of Baseball Exhibit Opening Reception (Boathouse Gallery)

Saturday, May 18, 2013, Noon-4 p.m., Old Timers Players Day and Book Signing.

Saturday, June 22, 2013, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The Neighborhoods of Baseball Conference, sponsored by Cal Humanities.

July 2013, dates to be announced, Baseball film series throughout the month.

Saturday, Aug. 3, 2013, 7 p.m.-midnight: Noche de Risa, a Comedy Music and Dance Fundraiser for the Baseball Reliquary and Plaza de la Raza,

Sunday, Aug. 4, 2013, Noon-5 pm. The Neighborhoods of Baseball Exhibit Closing Event. A night of spoken word, poetry, and reading including a reading hosted by The Godly Monsters writers' group from 2pm-4pm.