

REMEMBERING THE LEGENDARY HANK AARON

February 5, 1934 – January 22, 2021

We are all aware that Henry Louis “Hank” Aaron, affectionately known as “Hammerin Hank,” was an American professional baseball right fielder who played 23 seasons in Major League Baseball, from 1954 through 1976. He had a career total of 755 home runs. Because of the color of his skin and the fact that he broke Babe Ruth’s record of 714 home runs, he was often a victim of racism.

He endured the effects of segregation and bigotry in a very nonthreatening manner. He became a respected change agent who broke racial barriers and fought for equality. As he fought continually for the rights of African Americans to participate in professional sports, he often endured death threats and received a tremendous amount of hate mail. Despite such obstacles, Hank Aaron helped baseball management understand that black ball players should be able to eat and stay in the same hotels as the white players.

Aaron was truly a superstar due to his accomplishments on and off the baseball field. As a champion and supporter of civil rights, he initiated many humanitarian efforts to better the lives and rights of African Americans. He was an honest and humble man who believed in helping others, as exemplified by his work with Boys and Girls Clubs across the nation to help develop the talents of young people.

In October 1999 Congress passed a resolution recognizing him as one of baseball’s greatest players and praising his work with his Chasing the Dream Foundation, which helps children age nine through adulthood to achieve their dreams. The Foundation’s goal is to promote youth development by providing funding to programs that support the achievements of youth with limited opportunities and to enable them to develop their talents and pursue their dreams. The Foundation has far exceeded its goal to grant 755 scholarships to deserving students. In addition, Hank and his wife, Billye, have given numerous large gifts and established endowed scholarships at universities and colleges throughout the southeast United States.

Fondly submitted by NAEA’s Jackie Whitt
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