FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 20, 2021

Contact: Amie M. Downs
412-350-3711 (office)
412-327-3700 (cell)
amie.downs@alleghenycounty.us

Fitzgerald Celebrates Negro Leagues, Rededicates Homestead Grays Bridge

PITTSBURGH – County Executive Rich Fitzgerald commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Negro Leagues today by officially rededicating the Homestead Grays Bridge in Homestead Borough. To celebrate the occasion, he unveiled a new bridge plaque, highlighted 22 new bridge banners that honor the Homestead Grays and Pittsburgh Crawfords baseball teams, and showcased a Grays state historical marker that was relocated this week next to the bridge.

Fitzgerald was joined at the event by Sean Gibson, Josh Gibson Foundation Executive Director and Gibson’s great grandson, and Homestead Mayor Betty Esper, as well as family and friends of former Grays and Crawfords players and owners.

“We are so fortunate that two of the greatest franchises in Negro Leagues history called Allegheny County home, and I’m thrilled to honor their legacy today,” said Fitzgerald. “The players on those teams were not just great athletes. Their perseverance and accomplishments in overcoming tremendous adversity continues to be inspirational. I hope their stories serve as a reminder here and across the country about how far we’ve come and how far we have yet to go to end discrimination and achieve equality for all.”

The Negro National League, the first African American professional baseball league, was established in 1920. Fitzgerald had intended to commemorate the Negro Leagues’ centennial by rededicating the bridge last summer. The festivities were postponed due to the pandemic, and today’s date – Grays owner Cumberland Posey’s birthday – selected so that invitees could gather to celebrate the milestone.

Erected in 1936, the Homestead Grays Bridge connects Pittsburgh and Homestead over the Monongahela River, and more than 40,000 vehicles use it daily. It was called the Homestead High-Level Bridge before being renamed the Homestead Grays Bridge in 2002, and metal signs honoring the Grays and Crawfords were installed in 2011. Since that time, no plaque was installed on the bridge memorializing the name change, and the metal signs faded. Fitzgerald tasked the Department of Public Works with remedying those issues.

The new 18” x 12” bronze plaque, made by Wendell August Forge, was placed on a stone pillar at the entrance to the west sidewalk on the Homestead side of the bridge. It is inscribed with the following:

In honor of the Homestead Grays’
unprecedented success and
profoundly positive impact on
baseball, this community, and our country.

The new 3’ x 7’ vinyl banners, designed and made at the county’s Sign Shop, were hung on the bridge’s light poles. They feature players and owners who made significant contributions to the Grays and Crawfords or have ties to the region. Drivers and pedestrians will see Grays banners when they head into Homestead and Crawfords banners as they go toward Pittsburgh.

The players and owners being honored are Sam Bankhead, James “Cool Papa” Bell, Ray Brown, Clarence Bruce, Oscar Charleston, Rap Dixon, Josh Gibson, Gus Greenlee, Vic Harris, Judy Johnson,

A Grays historical marker owned by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission was also moved to a more prominent location in a grassy area at the entrance to the bridge on the Homestead side. It was first installed in 2000 along Amity Street near East Fifth Avenue in Homestead.

Allegheny County has a long and rich baseball heritage, and the Grays and Crawfords were an important part of that. Founded in 1912, the Grays were one of the Negro Leagues’ most storied franchises. The team won nine Negro National League championships and three Negro World Series titles. The 1931 squad is considered by some baseball historians to be the greatest of all-time, as it featured seven individuals who were later inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

The Crawfords were one the Grays’ top rivals and dominated during parts of the 1930s. The team was home to some of the Negro Leagues’ most famous players, and it won three Negro National League championships.

# # #

Office of County Executive Rich Fitzgerald
101 Courthouse │ 436 Grant Street │ Pittsburgh, PA 15219
Phone: 412-350-6500 │ Fax: 412-350-6512
www.alleghenycounty.us

Follow us: alleghenyalerts │ facebook │ instagram │ linkedin │ nextdoor │ twitter │ youtube