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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT: Paul Johnson 501/225-5937
pj72205@comcast.net

Stan Musial, Al Simmons to Be Memorialized in Hot Springs With Dedication of Baseball Trail Marker on October 8

HOT SPRINGS NATIONAL PARK, Arkansas — A plaque marking visits to Hot Springs by Baseball Hall of Fame sluggers Stan (The Man) Musial and Al Simmons will be dedicated Tuesday, October 8, at the site of the Catholic church they attended when they were in the city.

The dedication will take place at 10 a.m. in front of St. Mary's of the Springs Catholic Church at the intersection of Central, Park and Whittington Avenues.

The plaque will be installed on the public median between St. Mary's of the Springs Catholic Church and First Presbyterian Church.

Those attending will include Martin Coco, who is director of ticket sales and marketing for the St. Louis Cardinals, and the son of lifetime Hot Springs resident Marty Coco.

A letter from Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan, the Archbishop of New York, will be read as part of the unveiling.

“This will mark the first addition to our Hot Springs Historical Trail since we created it last year,” said Steve Arrison, CEO of Visit Hot Springs. “And it is especially fitting that we honor the late Stan Musial, a hero to generations of Arkansans as well as fans worldwide, because of his association with the St. Louis Cardinals, who have been considered Arkansas’s ‘home team’ forever, it seems.”

Intensive research on the link of Musial and Simmons to Hot Springs has been underway for a year, Arrison said. The documentation of that link has been written by Bill Jenkinson of Pennsylvania, one of the five internationally known baseball researchers who helped create the Baseball Trail.

In creating the Baseball Trail, which commemorates Hot Springs’ role as The Birthplace of Spring Baseball, Jenkinson collaborated with Tim Reid from Florida, Don Duren from Dallas, Mark Blaeuer from Hot Springs, and Mike Dugan of Hot Springs to study spring baseball in Hot Springs.

The series of 26 historical markers dedicated in March 2012, is linked to the very latest digital technology that allows visitors to tour the city and visit places where America’s baseball legends came to play, train and visit during baseball’s golden age. More than 45 percent of the people in the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., either played baseball or were in some way associated with baseball training in Hot Springs.”

“One hundred thirty-four of the 295 members of the Hall of Fame can be associated with training, playing, visiting or otherwise being in Hot Springs, many from the late 19th Century,” Arrison said.

“When the Hot Springs Historical Baseball Trail was opened in 2012, it was planned that more plaques would be added as research continued and additional qualified honorees were identified,” Jenkinson said. “So, it is with great pride that the City of Hot Springs announces its two newest inclusions in ‘The Trail.’

“They are Hall of Fame sluggers Al Simmons and Stan Musial. These two legendary figures from baseball’s rich history both compare and contrast with one another. Both men began life with poor immigrant backgrounds, and had to work at an early age to help support their large families. Each grew up near large industrial complexes where soot and pollution were everyday issues.

“Both were Polish-American and devout Roman Catholics. Simmons and Musial both loved baseball, and worked tirelessly to reach their potential...in both cases, setting lasting records on their way to the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. Oddly, each man achieved his athletic goals while using batting techniques that defied traditional methodology. Yet, there were also differences.”

Jenkinson’s documentation says, in part:

“Although open and engaging, Simmons was a brash, swaggering fellow who was not opposed to self-promotion or occasional confrontation. Conversely, Musial was friendly, temperate and modest: more inclined to move folks with a warm smile than with a direct challenge.

“Alois Szymanski was born to Polish immigrant parents on the south side of Milwaukee on May 22, 1902. His father died when he was only 8 years old, which meant that young Al had to help his mother feed his five younger siblings. Happily, there was still time for baseball, and Simmons developed into a powerful and promising all-around diamond talent. Like many other ethnic ballplayers, Szymanski decided to “Anglicize” his name, whereupon he became Al Simmons. By age 22 in 1924, he joined the legendary Connie Mack and his Philadelphia Athletics. He was an instant success at the Major League level. Batting right-handed, the six-foot, 200-pound Simmons stepped toward third base as he swung, thereby inviting the peculiar nickname, ‘Bucketfoot Al.’”

Jenkinson said Simmons began coming to Hot Springs shortly after the conclusion of the 1928 season to “save his career” after suffering from ankle injuries / ailments that almost certainly were what would later be considered rheumatoid arthritis. He kept returning for the remainder of his life.

Simmons returned to Hot Springs in early February, 1930, and actually played his entire spring training schedule with the Minneapolis Millers (American Association) who were also in town.

Unquestionably, Jenkinson said, Simmons was drawn to Hot Springs for a variety of reasons, including his natural affinity for its history and culture. Yet, there were some practical baseball-only factors as well. For example, Al felt that the fields in Arkansas were better maintained than their counterparts in Florida. Plus, he believed that the turf was softer around Hot Springs than in Fort Myers, thereby making life easier for his weak ankles. Furthermore, Simmons preferred the Arkansas weather over that in Florida. In this regard, Al was a little like Goldilocks and her porridge. Simmons felt that the temperatures in the Valley were not too hot...not too cold...but just right. According to Al, the temps were ideal for hiking and training from February through early March. Then, in late March and early April, the climate was perfect for playing baseball.

Al Simmons died of a heart attack in Milwaukee on May 26, 1956, at the age of 54. Fortunately, he lived long enough to celebrate his induction into the Hall of Fame three years earlier. Baseball fans across the country mourned his passing, including superstar Stan Musial.

Stanislaw Franciszek Musial was born in Donora, Pa., on November 21, 1920. His father, Lukasz, was a Polish immigrant, and his mother, Mary, traced her roots to the Carpathian Mountains in Eastern Europe.

Donora was a typical, working-class town where folks earned their livelihoods by laboring long hours in one of the three steel-related foundries. That was the case with the Musial family where young “Stashu” was expected to do his part in

helping to make ends meet. Fortunately, athletic activity was also encouraged, and Stanislaw was enrolled in a Polish gymnastics club (The Falcons) for four years as a child.

His innate coordination was exceptional. By the time he was a teenager, Stanley (yes, he also adjusted his name to his local culture) was recognized as a rising star in both baseball and basketball. Eschewing a hoops scholarship to the University of Pittsburgh, Musial agreed to a modest contract with the St. Louis Cardinals in 1937 before graduating from high school.

Despite being a good hitter, Stan was signed as a left-handed pitcher with the Cards. Although never regarded as the next Lefty Grove, Musial did well in the St. Louis farm system until falling on his left shoulder late in the 1940 season. When he reported to Florida the following spring, his velocity was gone, and his prospects were virtually nonexistent. Yet, Stan Musial always seemed to have a guardian angel. In this case, it was Ollie Vanek who was the scout who had helped to sign the seventeen-year-old-pitcher back in '37. At that pivotal moment, Vanek was the manager of the Cards' Class-C team in Springfield, Missouri.

With essentially no other options, 20-year-old Stanley Musial was reborn as a novice outfielder for the Springfield Cardinals in 1941. It proved to be one of the most miraculous transformations in the history of American sports. In eighty-seven games at Springfield, Musial tore apart Western Association pitching at a torrid .379 clip, whereupon he was promoted to Class-AA Rochester in the International League. There, in 54 contests, Stan batted .326 before returning home to Donora.

Settling in for the off-season, Musial was suddenly and unexpectedly summoned by the Cardinals who were making a late run for the National League pennant. Joining the big club in mid-September, the shy kid from the steel mills of Western Pennsylvania batted .426 over the final twelve games in that seemingly fictional series of events. In April 1941, Stan Musial had been a sore-armed pitcher who almost nobody wanted, and, by September of that same year, he was a slugging outfielder who was the envy of every franchise in Major League Baseball.

With Musial as their everyday left fielder in 1942, the St. Louis Cardinals accomplished something that had eluded them the preceding year. They won the National League pennant over the Brooklyn Dodgers as Stan batted .315. In fact, that was the start of a decade-long Cardinal dynasty. For the remainder of the 1940s, St. Louis finished in either first or second place, winning the World Series three times along the way (1942, 1944 and 1946). Their biggest rival in that time was those Brooklyn Dodgers.

As for Stan Musial, his personal ascendancy was extraordinary. In 1942, he won the first of his seven National League batting championships, hitting .357. When he missed the entire 1945 campaign due to his wartime service in the Navy, Stan won his second batting crown (.365) upon his return in 1946. It was in that same

year that Musial acquired his famous nickname. Playing in Brooklyn's Ebbets Field versus the rival Dodgers, the hometown fans began chanting "Here comes the man" whenever Stan came to the plate. That refrain quickly morphed into one of baseball's legendary sobriquets: *Stan the Man*.

It was an amazing event when considered in its full context. In general, the folks in Brooklyn hated the St. Louis Cardinals. Plus, when Musial came to town, he was particularly effective in blasting baseballs over the nearby right field wall onto Bedford Avenue. Yet, even though Stan competitively tormented the Dodgers, their fans just could not dislike him. Stan Musial was simply too kind, too friendly and too classy for anyone not to like and admire.

When Jackie Robinson joined the Dodgers in 1947, thereby breaking MLB's Color Barrier, there were rumors that the somewhat Southern St. Louis franchise would not take the field with him. Musial would have none of that. Coming from Donora where all races worked and played together in relative harmony, Stan couldn't see it any other way (Ken Griffey, Jr's grandfather, Buddy, had been a high school teammate). Although he was always reluctant to talk about it afterward, Stan the Man helped to defuse a potentially ugly incident by quietly leading his teammates into competition with Robinson.

By 1950, the Cardinals were no longer a National League power, but the baseball life of Stan Musial was still soaring. That was also the first year in which we know for sure that Al Simmons interacted with Musial. In his 1964 autobiography (*The Man's Own Story* as told to Bob Broeg, Doubleday), Stan had this to say:

"Although I still thought of 3,000 hits as only a hazy summit somewhere in the distance, I'd had encouraging advice from an old campaigner who had just missed-Al Simmons. In my boyhood, Aloysius Szymanski of the champion Philadelphia Athletics had been one of baseball's greatest hitters. He was also a particular hero to kids of Polish ancestry. I had met Simmons in the spring and he said: "Go after the 3,000 hits, kid. When I look back on games I missed that I might have played, times at bat I wasted carelessly, it was too late. I didn't have enough left to make it, and just missed by 73. So stay in there and bear down all the way."

By that time, Stan Musial (along with Ted Williams) was regarded as the best all-around hitter in baseball. Although not a large man, standing six-feet tall and weighing 175 pounds, Stan packed a mighty wallop from his unusual, coiled crouch from the left side of the plate. Back in 1948, Musial had reached his career high with thirty-nine home runs, and finished his time in the Big Leagues with an impressive total of 475 four-baggers. Apparently, he listened to Al Simmons as well. Stan played as often and as intensely as he could, finishing his career with the Cardinals in 1963 at the age of nearly forty-three. In that time, he amassed a lifetime batting average of .331 and accrued the astonishing total of 3,630 hits (exactly 1,815 both at home and away), including 725

doubles and 177 triples. Stan drove in 1,951 runs, and scored 1,949 times. He was also a speedy runner and dependable defender in either left field or at first base (where he often played according to team need).

Since Stan Musial came along after the glory days of Hot Springs' baseball, he has no record of playing there as did his buddy, Al Simmons. Yet, Musial was no stranger to competition in The Natural State, having played many spring games in nearby Little Rock. Stan still managed to develop a strong personal bond with Hot Springs by way of his close personal friendship with Arkansas native, Lon Warneke. "The Arkansas Humming Bird" had been a highly successful Big League pitcher (193 wins and 3.18 E.R.A.) and, later, a respected Major League umpire. In November 1951, both men spoke at a Lions Club meeting in Hot Springs, and Musial was known to have returned many times throughout his life to fish and hunt with Warneke in central Arkansas.

Stan also visited the Spa City with Cards owner Gussie Busch on numerous occasions (usually staying at the Arlington Hotel) where he took the baths, bet the ponies at Oaklawn Park, bowled, and hiked the mountain trails to stay in shape. It can reasonably be assumed that Simmons recommended such activity to Musial when giving him counsel for reaching his athletic potential.

Stan the Man Musial had a passion for living along with his love of baseball. He was an amateur magician as well as a devoted harmonica player, the latter activity being an annual ritual when Stan attended the Hall of Fame inductions in Cooperstown. Everywhere he went, people were drawn to him for his natural warmth and smiling countenance. When wearing his trademark Cardinals uniform, Musial played with a childlike joy which was infectious. After winning three Most Valuable Player Awards (1943, 1946 & 1948), appearing in 24 All-Star Games and setting countless records, Musial still had that gift. The day after the birth of his first grandchild on September 9, 1963, Stan walloped a home run and laughed all the way around the bases. Despite playing in over 3,000 Major League games, he was never ejected from any of them.

There was only one Stan the Man.

As further testament to his lifetime of hard work and conditioning (much of it performed in Hot Springs), Stan Musial set the Major League record for home runs after the age of 40; that total stands at 46. He is still the oldest Big Leaguer to record three home runs in a single game which he did on July 8, 1962, at New York's Polo Grounds, several months after his 41st birthday. For the record, that made it four in a row since Musial had clubbed a homer in his final at-bat the preceding day. What a guy!

Stan was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1969, and lived a long and happy life after retirement. He won too many honors to mention, but, of particular note, "The Man" was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Barack Obama in 2011. Stan Musial died peacefully in the company of his beloved family on January 19, 2013. After 92 years of productive and dignified life, Stan finally joined Al Simmons in death.

For more information call Steve Arrison at 501-321-2027.

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