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Alton to host American Legion Great Lakes Tourney

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ALTON - The American Legion has influenced considerable social change in America, won hundreds of benefits for veterans and produced many important community programs for children and youth. Ask professional players and manager Don Mattingly, Albert Pujols, Alex Gordon, and St. Louis Cardinal rookie, Mitch Harris and retired pitcher, Chris Carpenter about the Legion's impact on their lives.

“This tournament puts our community and our program on a national stage,” Dennis Sharp, Metro East Bears General Manager explained. “It’s essential that we respect our service men and women, the game, our community and ourselves by raising the bar to a high level for our guests; we want them back here next year when we host 2016’s event. We also want visitors to see Alton as an Amateur Sports Destination.”

Citizens in the St. Louis area and throughout the Midwest can witness first hand the American Legion's community impact, as the Metro East and Alton, Illinois Post 126 play host to the American Legion's Great Lakes Regional Baseball Tournament. From August 5th through 9th, eight teams from Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin will compete for a trip to the American Legion World Series (ALWS) in Shelby, NC. By hosting the tournament our own Metro East Bears receives an automatic bid to participate in the event.

"I tell the players regularly that the reason we're here today may be baseball, but never forget the men and women serving in our Armed Forces that earned our freedom to play baseball," Manager Sharp noted.

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All games are played at Lloyd Hopkins Field located in Gordon Moore Park on Rt. 140 in Alton, Illinois. The tournament opens with the first game on Wednesday, August 5th at 10 am. In order to allow greater participation a formal Opening Ceremony will take place at 4pm on Wednesday between Games 3 and 4. The Opening Ceremony will include appearances and remarks by U.S. Congressman Bost (IL-13), American Legion representatives, active military personnel, veterans and local officials including Alton's Mayor Brant Walker.

Alton Post 126, the Host Committee, and the City of Alton has made a concerted effort to make sure that the baseball tourney doesn't look past the opportunity to honor our

military families, veterans, and wounded warriors. A limited number of banquet tables are available for purchase on a first come, first served basis. All proceeds will cover tourney costs and help with expenses for the 2016 Regional, also being hosted by Post 126.

Preceding the tournament, players, coaches, and officials will be treated to an evening of celebration at a Tournament Banquet on Tuesday, August 4th. The evening gathering will include remarks by special guests including Col. Anthony Mitchell - Commander, St. Louis District, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers; Darcy Clardy - Midwest Regional Director, Operation Homefront; Derrick Ater - Tournament Director, American Legion; Chad Opel - MVP, 1998 American Legion World Series; with the Keynote Address delivered by Mike Girsch, Assistant General Manager, St. Louis Cardinals.

Sharp also pointed out that, "On Sunday, August 9th, one team will emerge as the Great Lakes Regional Champion and move on to the ALWS. More than 180 players, coaches, umpires, and Legion staff will spend part of their vacation in Alton, Illinois, for what may be a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

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The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veterans organization. Focusing on service to veterans, service-members and communities, the Legion evolved from a group of war-weary veterans of World War I into one of the most influential nonprofit groups in the United States. Today, membership stands at over 2.4 million in 14,000 posts worldwide.

For more information and tournament pairings, go to <http://www.legion.org/baseball/tournaments/greatlakes> or contact: Dennis Sharp, (618) 920-8938, post126baseball@yahoo.com.