‘Chicago Civil Wars’ will bring baseball fans together at Elmhurst museum

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If you want to appropriately emphasize “civil wars,” then have drawings of opposing cannons in ballparks facing off at one end of your exhibit, then feature a giant photo of Michael Barrett landing a right hand on A.J. Pierzynski’s “grill” (thanks, Ed Farmer) at the opposite end.

In between, there’s a little bit of everything about the Cubs and White Sox that goes beyond who is best-loved and who has bragging rights in Chicago.

Actually, emphasizing civil conflict, cannons and punchouts at home plate is the come-on, the sizzle. The steak is the contents, celebrating the parallel but separate existences of the Cubs and Sox with an emphasis on how the fans developed their loyalties.

What may be shortfalls in budget and space (1,000 square feet) is made up for in enthusiasm and creativity in “Sox vs. Cubs: The Chicago Civil Wars,” a new baseball exhibit at the Elmhurst Historical Museum, 120 E. Park Ave., open from 1 to 5 p.m. Tuesday to Sunday through Sept. 28. The Chicago Baseball Museum has assisted in the compilation of information and exhibits for the exhibit, a walk down memory lane through the city’s baseball annals.

Exhibit curator Lance Tawzer (left) with his replica of the U.S. Cellular Field scoreboard. Tawzer also constructed a faux Wrigley Field scoreboard (right). Both displays have video screens in the center with fan recollections, such as broadcast personality Bob Sirott’s in the Wrigley board.
“Chicago Civil Wars” also is a much-requested journey. The Elmhurst museum, operating in a quaint old building just off the western suburb’s downtown, already has fielded inquiries from all over the Chicago area about the exhibit traveling to set up shop elsewhere at the end of the scheduled run and even as far into the future as 2016.

If the Cubs and White Sox devoted even such modest space and scope in their ballparks to their history, the setup would be an attraction. In the absence of those facilities and while the Chicago Baseball Museum is still in negotiations to build its brick-and-mortar home, “Chicago Civil Wars” is a welcome contribution to understanding and enjoying the grand old game.

**Museum constructs interactive exhibits**

Any 21st century museum needs interactive exhibits to engage visitors, and this exhibit does not disappoint.

No, the budget did not permit a pitching tunnel, a la the Reds Museum in Cincinnati, where you can throw off a rubber 60 feet, six inches away from a target that times your pitch and calls it a ball or strike. And there is no kiosk where you can “design” your own custom-made ballpark as is featured at the Royals Museum in Kauffman Stadium.

But “Chicago Civil Wars” does offer a Trivia Challenge, with relatively easy or challenging questions, the Cubs info provided by the Chicago Baseball Museum and the Sox stuff submitted by team historian Rich Lindberg. Touch the image of the player (one of three choices) you think is the answer, and a virtual umpire signals you “safe” or “out.”

Or go further in the exhibit to pick out your all-time Chicago team under images of Frank Thomas and Ernie Banks. The votes will be tabulated and revealed weekly on the museum’s Facebook page.

Museum curator Lance Tawzer assembled the interactive exhibits himself on-site.

“I did the iPads, the videos and everything,” he said. “I taught myself to do everything. We’re a small museum. We’re trying to be ambitious with regard to not only the subject matter, but also the level of technology. It’s been a trial-by-fire.

“Each time I do one of these exhibits, I realize there’s an opportunity to do something a little more intense the next time. I’d love to get even more interactive with the some of
the touch stuff and maybe some of the tactile stuff. Doing temporary exhibits, they have to be affordable and durable. When you do permanent exhibits, you can get a lot fancier, but the budgets are usually higher, too.”

**Author Rothschild plays it down the middle**

The historical text on exhibits was written by Richard Rothschild, a former *Chicago Tribune* sports staffer.

“I wanted someone who is not biased,” Tawzer said. “He’s from Texas. He approached it the right way.”

Tawzer obtained photos not only from the Chicago Baseball Museum, but also the Hall of Fame. The Cubs and Sox were helpful in loaning some artifacts.

For the actual Cubs-Sox rivalry, Tawzer assembled a big graphic timeline showing each team’s attendance, ownership and uniform styles. Year-by-year historical developments were included. Another display plays off the color-coded “Baseball Nation” map just published by the *New York Times* that shows Facebook likes for each team by zip codes. Tawzer focused the map on the state of Illinois and the central part of the Chicago area. Elmhurst itself was split 50-50, he said.

Among all the other historical displays, the standouts were replica Wrigley Field and U.S. Cellular Field scoreboards. In the center of each scoreboard were video screens on which Cubs and Sox fans explained how they gave their allegiance to their favorites.

Also on display were replica record covers of songs associated with each team – Capt. Stubby and the Buccaneers’ “Let’s Go Go Go White Sox” and Steve Goodman’s “A Dying Cubs Fan’s Last Request.”

**Kasper, Hughes, Jackson give their thoughts**

A series of touch-screen media commentaries about “Chicago Civil Wars” features this writer, Lindberg, Cubs announcers Len Kasper and Pat Hughes, Sox announcer Darrin Jackson, sports-talk-show pioneer Chet Coppock, The Score’s Bruce Levine and WGN TV’s Dan Roan, among others.

Checking out all the exhibits at a recent sneak preview was Hinsdale resident Steve Foster, who is a living connection to local baseball history himself. His late father,
Chuck Foster, was a friend of the Comiskey family, also Hinsdale residents. Interestingly, the late Bill Veeck grew up in Hinsdale, too. Veeck and the last of the Comiskey owners, Chuck Comiskey, engaged in a duel over ownership that Veeck and chosen successor Arthur Allyn, Jr. won.

Even though Foster knew Comiskey, he rooted for a different team. He’s a Cubs fan.

“I think it’s great,” Foster said. "I love baseball in general and its history. I went out to Cooperstwon a couple of falls ago to see Ron Santo’s plaque. Now, with Maddux going in, I want to make a trek out for that (induction) as well. Being a Cubs fan, preserving that history is huge. When you have a team that has as much history, it’s important.”

Also attending the sneak preview was Mike Kopp, Elmhurst’s assistant city manager. The allure of baseball will certainly provide a “gate attraction” for the central business district with its shops, restaurants and historic York Theater, which hosted the Chicago-area debut of The Million Dollar Arm movie. The theater has a trailer with Roan and Coppock promoting “Chicago Civil Wars.”

“Lance and the team have done a fantastic job on this exhibit,” said Kopp, who grew up a Sox fan in the South Side Roseland neighborhood. “That’s one of the things we look at is try to get the people to Elmhurst. This is an attraction that does it. We’ll definitely promote it every chance we get.”

**Summer-long schedule of events**

Following is a list of special events scheduled in connection with the Elmhurst Historical Museum and “Chicago Civil Wars:”

- **18th Annual Elmhurst Museum Day**, 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday, May 18. Celebrate International Museum Day as Elmhurst’s three museums open their doors for an afternoon of learning and fun for the entire family. Create your own baseball card and enjoy refreshments. Baseball mascots will be on hand for photo ops.

- **Elmhurst Heritage Foundation Member/Donor Exhibit Reception**, 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday, June 12. Members and donors are invited on an exclusive tour of “Chicago Civil Wars” exhibit with Rothschild. Complimentary hors d’oeuvres and
drinks will be provided in the Education Center. Reservations requested at ehm@elmhurst.org or 630/833-1457.

♦ **Sox Fans vs. Cubs Fan Trivia Night**, 8 and 9 p.m. June 19, at Pints, 112 S. York Road, Elmhurst.

Who knows their team trivia better: Cubs or Sox fans? Join in a trivia night like no other, featuring stadium beer specials and fun, themed prizes.

♦ **Gallery Talks with the Curator**, 4 p.m. June 20, July 18, Aug. 15 and Sept. 19.

Drop in on select Fridays to join Tawzer to explore the “Sox vs. Cubs” exhibit. You’ll learn more about the history of the rivalry and the process of objectively curating the exhibit.

♦ **Chicago baseball stadium tours.**

Each tour departs Elmhurst Historical Museum by coach bus. Fees include bus cost, historian, tour and appetizers at a restaurant near the stadium. Co-sponsored with the Elmhurst Park District. Registration required at www.epd.org.

♦ **Wrigley Field Tour**, 9:45 a.m. to 2:45 p.m., Saturday, June 21.

There is no better time to tour Wrigley Field than on its 100th anniversary. Wrigley Field historians Dan Campana and Rob Carroll, authors of Wrigley Field: 100 Stories for 100 Years, will keep you entertained on the ride to our stadium tour.

♦ **US Cellular Field Tour**, Friday July 11, 9:45 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday, July 11.

Depart EHM with historian Lindberg, author of Total White Sox, enlightening you with club history and trivia on the way, and arrive for a behind-the-scenes tour of the field.

♦ **Root for the Home Team Lawn Party**, 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday, July 20, Elmhurst Historical Museum Grounds.

Baseball fans of all ages are invited to join the Elmhurst Historical Museum in celebrating organized youth baseball in Elmhurst with a family-friendly event featuring food, games and tours of the Sox vs. Cubs exhibit.

Complimentary snacks, including ice cream, are provided. Hot dogs are available for purchase. Youth baseball players are asked to wear their uniforms. The program will run rain or shine.

♦ **Film Series Triple Play.**

Enjoy an evening watching a favorite beloved baseball classic. Each screening will include an introduction by a film historian who will also lead a discussion following the film. Movies begin at 6:30 p.m. The free film series includes: *Eight Men Out* (July 24), *Field of Dreams* (Aug. 21) and *The Stratton Story* (Sept 11).
Chicago in the World Series Lecture, 7 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 7, Elmhurst Historic Museum Education Center.

Beginning in 1903 and ending in the present day, professor and author Bruce Rubenstein shares the history of each teams’ infrequent visits to the World Series, some of which happened before the advent of radio broadcasts.

Meanwhile, more programs for families will be held at the Elmhurst Public Library, 125 S. Prospect:

Summer Fun & Games, Noon to 2 p.m. June 17, July 8 and July 22.

Stop by to discover more about the “Sox vs. Cubs” exhibit and create your own fan memento. Best for children ages 4-12 accompanied by a caregiver.

Swing! The Science of Baseball, 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. or 3 to 4 p.m., Friday, July 11.

Try cool science experiments to learn how Newton’s Three Laws of Motion apply to baseball.

Free reservations are requested for these two events at 630/279-8696 or www.elmhurstpubliclibrary.org.

For more information on all events, visit: www.elmhursthistory.org.