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SPORTS & EVENTS AUTHORITY ANNOUNCES RETURN OF BIG 26 BASEBALL CLASSIC

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Left to right: Dauphin County Community & Economic Development Executive Director George Connor, Visit Hershey Harrisburg President and CEO Mary Smith, Dauphin County Commissioner George Hartwick, Dauphin County Commissioner Jeff Haste, Big 26 Director of Baseball Operations Mike Gingerich, Harrisburg Senators General Manager Randy Whitaker, Hershey Harrisburg Sports & Events Authority Executive Director Gregg Cook, Dauphin County Commissioner Mike Pries.

The Hershey Harrisburg Sports & Events Authority (HHSE) today announced the return of the Big 26 Baseball Classic® to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in 2018. Today's announcement also included news that HHSE now holds the rights to the Big 26 event.

The Big 26 Baseball Classic® features rising high school sophomores and juniors from Pennsylvania and Maryland. Two teams of 26 are selected through a try-out process, and players practice and compete in front of college coaches and professional scouts.

The game (and related programming such as the Buddy Challenger Game) was canceled in 2017 due to changes at the Big 33 Foundation, the entity which had helped to promote both the Big 33 Football Classic® and the Big 26 Baseball Classic®. The Pennsylvania State Football Coaches Association, which had facilitated the Big 33 game, continues to do so. HHSE is now the official rights holder for the Big 26.

"We're thrilled to play a key role in keeping this tradition on the sports landscape in the Hershey Harrisburg region. Talented athletes will showcase their skills here at FNB Field, where the likes of Stephen Strasburg and Bryce Harper began their rise to major league superstardom with the Washington Nationals," said HHSE Executive Director Gregg Cook.

According to Cook, HHSE (launched in 2016 to support sports & events tourism in Hershey and Harrisburg) planned to look in to producing events sometime after 2020. The opportunity to take on that role with the Big 26 came earlier than expected, but HHSE is eager to lead the event into a new era.

"We have lofty goals. No Super Bowl has been played without a Big 33 alumnus, and we don't see why every college and major league championship shouldn't have a Big 26 alum on the field as well, said Cook."



Success in a new era starts with strength in the past. Long-time Big 26 operations coordinator Mike Gingerich stays with the program as Director of Baseball Operations. “Mike’s knowledge of the game and his passion for the event make him an integral factor for the success of the Big 26 moving forward,” said Cook.

HHSE will support the event with PR and marketing, and the organization also expects to build an internship program to coordinate player communications and related event programming. A new website, www.big26.com, will launch soon.

The Big 26 would be unrecognizable without its Buddy program, where special needs children ages 5-21 with intellectual and developmental disabilities are paired with Big 26 players for on and off the field activities. That tradition will continue in 2018 as a glowing example of the spirit of sportsmanship.

The 2018 Big 26 Baseball Classic® will be held at FNB Field, home of the Harrisburg Senators. Dates and details for regional tryouts, team practices, the Buddy Challenger Game and the Big 26 Baseball Classic® will be announced after the first of the year. The game and related events will take place over a weekend (Friday-Sunday) in the summer of 2018.

About Big 26

The Big 26 Baseball Classic® features all-star high-school baseball players from Pennsylvania and Maryland. Try-outs are held across each state to field the two teams of 26. The spirit of sportsmanship shines through the Buddy Program, where players are paired with a special needs children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Buddies share time with the athletes both on and off the field during the event.

About Hershey Harrisburg Sports & Events Authority (HHSE)

The mission of HHSE is to promote sports tourism and events initiatives in the Hershey Harrisburg Region, to forge mutually beneficial partnerships with new and existing clients, support locally produced events to expand audiences, and drive economic development as it relates to sports and events tourism.

HHSE is a division of Visit Hershey Harrisburg (VHH). VHH is the official non-profit partnership-based Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Dauphin and Perry Counties located in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

