

## **On the Bright Side: Baseball great to be lauded at charity event Thursday**

By Denise Richardson, Staff Writer  
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Oneonta, NY \_An Oneonta man has organized a birthday celebration for baseball giant Roberto Clemente, who would have turned 75 today.

Steve Pindar, co-founder of Roberto's Kids, has arranged activities this week with three minor-league teams in New York State, including the Oneonta Tigers on Thursday.

Roberto Clemente Jr. will throw out the first pitch at the Tigers game at 7:05 p.m. A collection for Roberto's Kids, which gives baseball equipment to disadvantaged youths, will be held, organizers said, and fans donating new or gently used gloves or other baseball items will be admitted free to the game.

Oneonta Tigers Roberto Clemente Night is the first of its kind, said Pindar, director of community relations for the local team.

Pindar said Clemente, the first Hispanic inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, was an outstanding player whose professional success didn't eclipse his humanitarian spirit.

“He never forgot where he came from,” Pindar said Monday.

Born in Puerto Rico on Aug. 18, 1934, Clemente was the youngest of four children, according to a biography on MLB.com. Clemente joined the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1955, where he played his entire 18-year major-league career. He played in two World Series, was the National League Batting Champion four times, was awarded 12 Gold Gloves, was selected National League MVP in 1966 and was chosen as the MVP in the 1971 World Series.

On Sept. 30, 1972, Clemente hit a double to earn his 3,000th major-league hit.

On New Year's Eve that year, he and four others boarded a plane to deliver relief supplies to earthquake-c Nicaragua, but the plane crashed and left no survivors.

Since 1972, Major League Baseball annually has presented an award to a player who best exemplifies the game of baseball, sportsmanship, community involvement and contribution to his team. Originally called the Commissioner's Award, the honor was re-named the Roberto Clemente Award in 1973.

On Aug. 6, 1973, Clemente, who had a lifetime .317 average with 240 homers and 1,305 RBIs, was posthumously inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Roberto's Kids, a nonprofit organization based in Oneonta, has collected and given away tons of baseball equipment, Pindar said. Through playing baseball, youths learn social and community responsibility, build character and develop personal and leadership skills, according to [www.robertos-kids.org](http://www.robertos-kids.org).

Pindar said the effort started when he and his wife, Lisa, went on a church mission in 1997 to the Dominican Republic, where they saw children use a stick for a bat and rocks for balls. The charity effort began as a no-name project with a donation in 1999 of old and unused equipment from the Oneonta Little League.

Originally, Pindar family members took donations with them on a plane when they traveled, but the quantity collected now is so great that contributions are shipped in sea containers. Pindar said Roberto's Kids has collected from donors in about 30 states and three Canadian provinces.

In 2005, through help from the Hall of Fame, Pindar connected with Steve Tremiere, who had collected equipment he sent to the Clemente Family Sports Complex in Puerto Rico. Pindar invited Tremiere to join with him to expand the impact of their projects; Roberto's Kids was formed in January 2006 and operates under the Roberto Clemente Foundation in Pittsburgh, Pindar said.

On Monday, Pindar said he hopes to collect more equipment at games this week in Oneonta, Binghamton and Syracuse.

Pindar said he spoke with Clemente Jr. during activities at the Hall of Fame for the opening of an exhibit titled "Viva Baseball!" in May and suggested a 75th birthday remembrance. The result is a trip with three stops with minor league teams.

``It's very, very exciting," Pindar said. ``Extremely exciting."

Tonight, Clemente Jr. will be at NYSEG Stadium in Binghamton as the Double-A affiliate of the New York Mets celebrates Latin American Night at a 6:30 game with the New Britain Rock Cats.

On Wednesday night, Clemente Jr. will attend Latino Baseball Night at Alliance Stadium when the Syracuse Chiefs, Triple-A affiliate of the Washington Nationals, will play the Buffalo Bisons at 7 p.m. Clemente Jr. will accept a special award from the International League on behalf of his father, the Syracuse team's website said.

The O-Tigers are the Single-A short season affiliate of the Detroit Tigers.

Last year, Roberto's Kids shipped 25 tons of baseball equipment to the Dominican Republic, Pindar said. This year, shipments have gone to Nicaragua and Puerto Rico, he said, and another is planned for the Dominican Republic later this year.

``We're continuing Roberto Clemente's legacy," Pindar said. ``It's the right thing to do."