

Photo by Lee Blum



Lawrenceville
is home
to the
Clemente
Museum



Photo by Pittsburgh Press

PRESERVING A HERO'

Many Pittsburghers have fond memories of Roberto Clemente, the Pittsburgh Pirates' sensational Hall of Famer who played for the team from 1955 to 1972. Stories of his arm unleashing lasers from right field, his whiplash swing launching countless triples, and his majestic stance on second base after his final and 3,000th hit, have been passed down through the generations.

Duane Rieder wants to make sure Clemente will never be forgotten. In 2006, to preserve the legacy, Rieder, a professional photographer and baseball enthusiast, opened the Clemente Museum at his studio in the 113-year old Engine House No. 25 at 3339 Penn Avenue in lower Lawrenceville. Today, this landmark—where another baseball legend, Lou Gehrig, once slept—houses the largest collection of Clemente memorabilia in the world.

"Very few places have Clemente memorabilia, even in places like the sports history section at the Heinz History Center," Rieder says. "I wanted to do something to keep his memory alive."

Rieder isn't just referring to Clemente's athletic accomplishments: two World Series, one World Series MVP, one league MVP, four batting titles, 12 All-Star appearances, 12 Gold Gloves, and 3,000 hits.

"Yes, he was a great baseball player, but he was simply an amazing person too," says Rieder. "But I'm afraid he's drifting from our memories. I thought I could bring him back to life a little."

Everyone knows the tragic ending. On December 31, 1972, Clemente died a hero's death. While flying to Nicaragua to help deliver food and





Just some of the Clemente memorabilia lining the walls of the museum.

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medical supplies following a devastating earthquake, Clemente was killed in a plane crash.

"The way he died was an example of the way he lived...helping others," says Vera Clemente, Roberto's wife. "I hope that's what people remember most about him—not just that he was a great baseball player, but how he was always trying to do good."

About a year before the Clemente statue at PNC Park was unveiled during the 1994 All-Star Game in Pittsburgh, Rieder was commissioned to work on a Clemente calendar. He flew to Puerto Rico to meet Vera and the rest of the family and took photos of Clemente's trophies, busts, statues, uniforms, and other items. Then in 1996, Rieder traveled back to Puerto Rico while working on a Clemente story for a publication. During that time, he discovered water-damaged family photos in the basement of the Clemente home. He offered to bring the photos back to his studio to restore and keep them safe. This led to Rieder becoming the official Clemente family archivist and brought him closer to the Clemente family.

"When you start hanging out with Vera and Roberto's inner circle of friends, you hear stories about the type of person Roberto was," says Rieder. "You find out the things that he did when he wasn't playing baseball. All of sudden, you're like, wow, this guy was the real deal."

One of Rieder's favorite stories was about how Clemente spent his off-time visiting with children in the poor neighborhoods in Puerto Rico. Armed with rolls of coins, he would ask the kids their names and where they were from and give each of them a silver dollar.

"While everyone else on the team was drinking beer and carousing, Clemente was always trying to do good things," says Rieder.

As he began helping the Clemente family build an archive of Clemente photographs, Rieder wanted to bring the photos more to life and started adding pieces of memorabilia to the photographs.

"I thought how cool would it be to put a signature, a contract, a letter, or an airline ticket together with the photographs," he says.

That began his quest for collecting all things Clemente.

"For the 2006 All-Star Game in Pittsburgh, I hung up all of the prints for a private Clemente family party," he says. "It was at this point when people commented on how much like a museum this place was. When that word gets thrown around, you start thinking about taking the next step, from archive to museum."

Vera gave Rieder her blessing to start the museum.

"We got to know Duane over the years from his wonderful work on the calendar project and other projects," she says. "We have become such close friends over the years. We were happy and honored when we learned about the museum. My family wanted to help him out in any way, and so we've lent and donated some items."

Ask Rieder about his favorite photo and he'll point to a shot of Clemente down on one knee, snapping a photo of Willie Stargell's daughter and son with his camera. Among the other priceless gems on exhibition, along with thousands of photographs, autographed baseballs, uniforms, bats,

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gloves, letters, contracts, and union cards, is the 1961 Silver Bat Clemente received as batting champ, his first Silver Bat—currently on loan from Vera—as well as a letter from Clemente to Pirates' general manager Branch Rickey requesting more money.

"The best piece that I personally own is a pair of his cleats resting on the 1971 World Series home plate," says Rieder. "I'll never give that up."

Currently, visits to the historic 12,000-square-foot, two-story museum are by appointment only. Rieder's goal is to eventually open it to the public.

PRESERVING A HERO'S



Photos by Rieder Photography

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Above: The museum's main display room was originally the bunk room for the engine house. **Left:** A collection of photos by one-time Pirates photographer Les Baras hangs above seats from Three Rivers Stadium.



Duane Rieder

LEGACY

"I'd love to be open this April for Opening Day," he says. "But in order for the museum to be open to the public, we need a corporate sponsor or a few hefty grants so I could hire several docents and build out the museum even more."

Les Banos, the Pirates team photographer from 1969 to '77 and a close personal friend of Clemente, has been impressed by Rieder's work on the museum.

"The museum is incredible," says Banos, who helps Rieder conduct weekly tours. "Duane has been very enthusiastic and totally committed to the project from the beginning. What an outstanding job he's done."

Banos, who took the shot of Clemente's 3,000th hit, has his own wing on the top floor of the museum.

"I would do anything to help keep the Clemente legend alive because I respected him," says Banos. "He was a selfless individual. As long as people can keep Clemente's memory alive, as a ballplayer and as a humanitarian, I think it's worth having a whole museum dedicated to him."

As you enter the museum, the first photo you'll notice is a four-framed shot taken during spring training in 1960. Clemente is in mid-air snaring a line drive. In the background, clouds appear to be resting on his shoulders, forming what looks like angel's wings on his back.

"Just look at that," comments Rieder. "God always had a plan for that guy." ES

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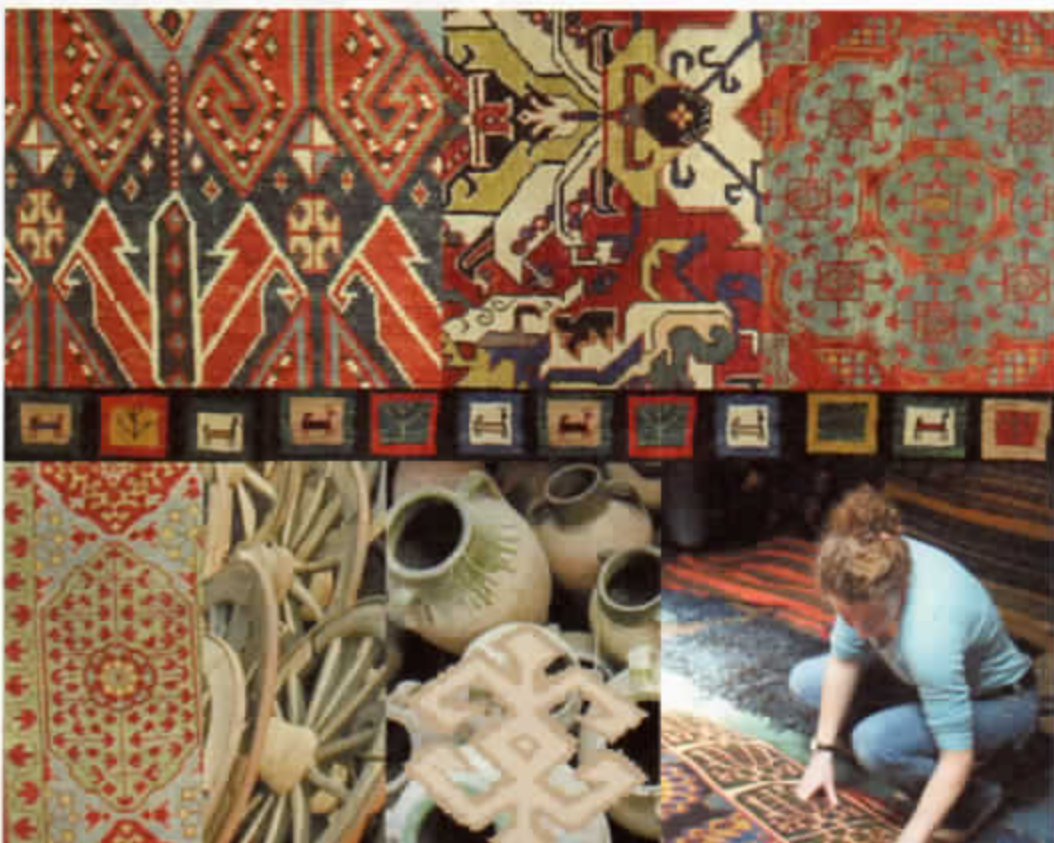
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