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Fields were the dream New baseball and softball complex named after Jackie Robinson opens at SUNY Old Westbury

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SUNY Old Westbury yesterday completed a dream, first proposed in the late 1990s, by dedicating its newly refurbished baseball and softball fields in the name of baseball legend Jackie Robinson.

"He was such a pioneering crusader for equal rights and equality for all," Old Westbury President Calvin O. Butts III said of Robinson, who broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball in 1947.

Butts said the improvements "give us the opportunity to expand our offerings of games as well as other events." It also gives Old Westbury the opportunity to "salute a great American, highlight the athletics and scholarship at Old Westbury, and to say to the larger community there is good work going on at this campus."

Old Westbury celebrated the new fields with a ceremony formally naming the fields the Jackie Robinson Athletic Complex. On hand were Robinson's daughter Sharon Robinson, an author and an educational consultant for Major League Baseball; and Della Britton Baeza, president and chief executive officer of the Jackie Robinson Foundation, a nonprofit organization founded in 1973 by Robinson's widow Rachel that provides college scholarships to young people.

Sharon Robinson said her family was "truly honored" by the naming of the fields. In a talk to those gathered for the ceremony, she spoke of her father's legacy having transcended sports, and she challenged the campus athletes to think beyond the baseball diamond or the football field. "Your role is much larger than that," she said. She also cited words she said appeared on her father's gravestone: "A life is not important except for the impact it has on others."

Butts said Old Westbury's connection to the Robinson family was first forged around 1997 when the college proposed improving its baseball and softball fields. Butts, who was not at the college then but became president in 1999, said when he arrived at Old Westbury he learned that the service organization, 100 Black Men of Long Island, had obtained the Robinson family's permission to name the field after the baseball great.

Old Westbury began design work in 2002, said Butts, who noted that the State University of New York and state Sen. Carl Marcellino (R-Syosset) had helped secure \$1.25 million in state funding. The renovation work, begun about a year ago, involved refurbishing the fields, adding bleachers, dugouts, bullpens, a press box and lighting.

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