**Living Legends**

By Anne Madarasz

**Gregg Ficery**

Some kids never learn. Sitting in class one day, 5-year-old Gregg Ficery shot a prearranged signal to his best friend, Dean Kartsonas. Both boys escaped to the bathroom where they settled in to share and compare their collections of baseball trading cards. Spotted by their teacher, who had already warned them not to bring the cards to school, they were punished and sent home. This event failed to dampen Ficery’s passion for collecting or his love of baseball, and now it serves as an enduring memory related to his lifelong quest to find and share the best in baseball collectibles.

Gregg Ficery comes by his love of sports naturally—through a family that has contributed to this region’s sporting heritage. His great grandfather, Bob Shiring, one of the pioneers of early professional football, played on the world champion Homestead team in 1901, the Pittsburgh Pros in 1902, and then the champion Massillon Ohio Tigers from 1903–06. Journalist Grantland Rice called Shiring the best center in the first quarter century of football. Shiring’s achievements, a proud part of Ficery family history, inspired Gregg to research early pro football.

On a visit to Pittsburgh from Atlanta, where Ficery now lives, that interest brought him to the History Center’s Sports Museum. There he discovered images of his great grandfather and the museum’s baseball trading cards display. In conversations with Museum staff, Gregg became interested in leaving a legacy here. Since that first visit, Ficery has donated 132 baseball cards, including rarities that date to the late 1880s, as well as a 1910–1911 M116 Sporting Life Honus Wagner and a 1955 Topps Roberto Clemente rookie card. In addition, he has donated 62 Steelers football cards, four of which are from the premiere 1935 National Chicle set. Through his card donations, Ficery has filled in many of the more expensive, rarer gaps in the museum’s baseball and football trading card collections. But his contributions go further—he has also purchased several commemorative items for the Sports Museum, including a football signed by his father in honor of his Dad’s playing days at Carnegie Tech and a trading card featuring his daughters. Beyond contributing financially and to exhibitions, Gregg says he wants to “share the feeling of joy I get from reflecting on the stories and memories of great Pittsburgh champions.”

For more information on the History Center’s commemorative program, please contact Erin Emily Engel at 412-454-6321 or eeengel@hswp.org.