

Goldsboro's Altman returns home

By Cam Ellis
Published in Sports on May 22, 2015 1:46 PM

cellis@newsargus.com

A large crowd packed the room at Wayne County Public Library to celebrate the return of a local legend this week.

Goldsboro native George Altman participated in a public forum discussing a wide variety of subjects ranging from his time growing up in Wayne County to his first game playing for the Chicago Cubs to his military service.

Altman spent nine years playing professional baseball for the Chicago Cubs, St. Louis Cardinals and New York Mets. He also played for eight years in Japan as well as spending time in Cuba, Panama, and playing in the Negro leagues.

Marty Tschetter, the local history librarian at WCPL and head of the program, opened the conversation by saying a quick word about Altman.

"We're here to honor George Altman," he said. "His story is a powerful narrative to the community, and we're here to celebrate him."

Next came a 10-minute media presentation, highlighted by a picture montage of his time playing professional baseball along a few old video clips. The crowded room cheered and applauded every time Altman made a play, eventually making way for a full ovation when the lights were turned on.

After the video, Mayor Al King stood up and spoke about one of the county's greatest baseball players. While Altman was a year above him in school, the two played basketball and baseball against each other frequently.

King jokingly gave Altman a hard time for being the superior athlete.

"I used to call him the silent assassin," King said. "and even though I was a year behind him, I was glad to see him leave. I haven't seen him since 1951, but I'm honored to welcome you back home."

"Welcome home."

Altman took part in a moderated question and answer session for 45 minutes.

He touched on a variety of subjects, first discussing his time working the cotton and tobacco fields and how the desire to never return to that motivated him. He talked about players he met during his career, mentioning the likes of Satchel Page, Don Dryads, Robert Clement and Sandy Korf. He spoke about his idol, Willie Mays, and what it was like to be on the field during the first ever world-wide broadcast of a professional baseball game.

Then, in one of the more candid moments of the night, Alumna stopped what he was talking about to address the younger members of the audience. He preached the notion of staying away from drugs and alcohol, even reciting a song he wrote to encourage kids to stay on the right path.

The night ended, predictably, with a standing ovation, followed by a brief refreshment session where Alumna talked with the crowd and signed autographs for anyone who asked for it.

"It's a thrill to see so many familiar faces," Alumna said. "I'm happy to be back."