

In 2004, Iowa native and Nobel Peace Prize winner Norman Borlaug tossed out a first pitch at Fenway Park ... and ended "The Curse of the Bambino" for the Red Sox. PHOTO BY JULIE CORDEIRO / BOSTON RED SOX

Iowa's Greatest Hero

Norman Borlaug fed the world and saved a billion lives ... and ended baseball's oldest curse

By AMBASSADOR KENNETH M. QUINN

Born in 1914, Norman Borlaug grew up on his family farm near Cresco, Iowa, with one dream: to play second base for the Chicago Cubs.

Inspired by the great Cubs double-play combination that had brought a World Series victory in 1908, Borlaug saw himself as the new Johnny Evers taking throws from Joe Tinker and firing them on to Frank Chance.

But, alas, it wasn't meant to be. Science classes intervened at the University of Minnesota, and Borlaug had to give up baseball. The Cubs' loss, however, was humanity's gain. Borlaug became a plant pathologist, developed a miracle wheat that dramatically increased yields throughout Latin America, Asia and the Middle East, and went on to be known around the world as the "Father of the Green Revolution" and the man who saved a billion lives.

For that, Borlaug won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 — and that led eventually to his being invited to throw out the first pitch at Fenway Park on June 9, 2004. It would be the night that the "Curse of the

'The Father of the Green Revolution' removed the 'Curse of the Bambino' ... can he do the same for the 'Curse of the Billy Goat' this year?

Bambino," which had haunted the Red Sox ever since they traded Babe Ruth to the Yankees in 1918, met its demise.

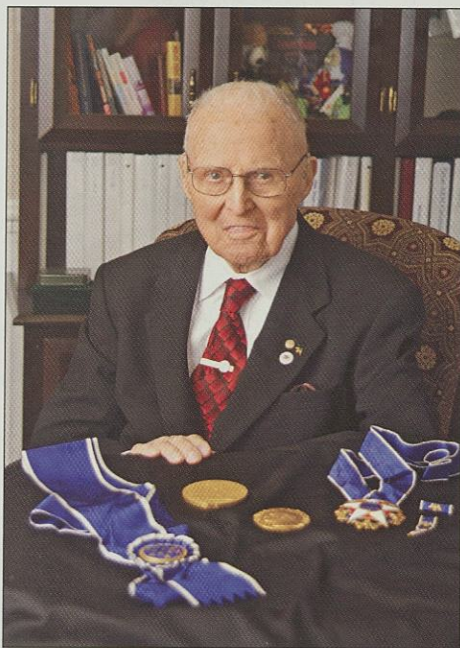
To understand how Borlaug drove the curse from Fenway, it's important to know a little bit about how exorcisms work. Essentially, the theory goes that when a person or object is possessed by an evil spirit, it takes a larger and more powerful spirit to confront it and dislodge it.

Until that fateful night in June, 2004, no sufficiently large good spirit had ever come to Fenway to confront the evil Bam-

bino curse. All that changed that evening when Norman Borlaug — saver of a billion lives — walked through the gate. After all, Borlaug is the "Babe Ruth of feeding the world." After taking the mound and throwing the first pitch, he watched the game from a seat on the Green Monster.

It's sometimes possible to tell when there has been a dislodging of an evil spirit through a physical manifestation such as a huge storm or a shifting of the earth. It was a beautiful night in Boston until suddenly during the sixth inning the skies darkened, lightning struck, and with a great clap of thunder a torrential rain fell from the sky, delaying the game for quite some time.

No one knew it at the time, but in hindsight it is clear that this sudden change in the weather was the sign that the "Curse of the Bambino" was exiting Fenway Park. The rest of the story is well known to baseball fans. The Red Sox had a great season, came back from a 3-0 deficit in the American League Championship Series to beat the Yankees and then went on to sweep the Cardinals in the World Series.



Dr. Borlaug with his high-profile awards.



Each October, the World Food Prize is presented at the Iowa State Capitol.

But how can we know that it was Norman Borlaug's appearance that eliminated the "Curse of the Bambino"? Well, if you look back at the dramatic Red Sox come from behind victory over the Yankees in game four of the ALCS, you will find that it was played on the weekend of October 16, the day that had been proclaimed by the United States Senate and by the governor and state legislature of Iowa as Norman Borlaug / World Food Prize Day in America. Surely no coincidence.

Norman Borlaug is a great Iowa and American hero. In addition to the Nobel Peace Prize, he has received the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional

sional Gold Medal. In all of history, only five people have received those three awards. Norman Borlaug is one. The other four are Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, Elie Wiesel, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

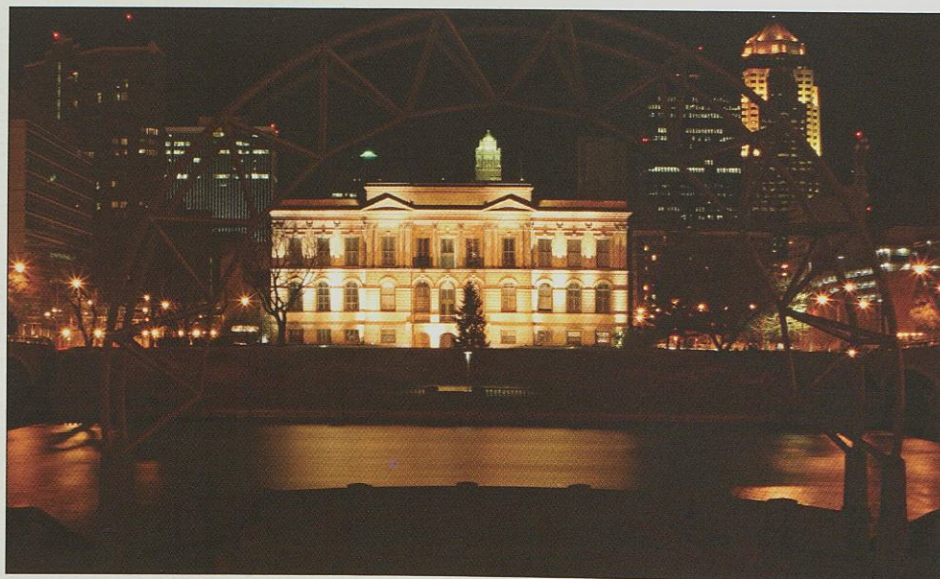
In 1986, he founded the Des Moines-based World Food Prize, a \$250,000 prize often referred to as the "Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture" given each October at the beautiful Iowa State Capitol you see beyond the center field wall. Just up the river, the historic former Des Moines public library building is being transformed into the Norman E. Borlaug Hall of Laureates to preserve Dr. Borlaug's legacy and the programs he created.

Like Tinker, Evers and Chance, Norman Borlaug is also in the Hall of Fame, although in his case it is the NCAA Wrestling Hall of Fame in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Thanks to the Iowa Cubs, Borlaug will go to Wrigley Field this season to throw out the first pitch for the Chicago Cubs. With a little of that Borlaug magic, perhaps the man who loved the Cubs as a boy could do to the Curse of the Billy Goat what he did to the Bambino and help bring the Cubs a World Series victory.

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Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn is president of The World Food Prize Foundation



The Norman E. Borlaug Hall of Laureates in downtown Des Moines.