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## Prospect League: Beckley a 'flagship'

### Commissioner in town tonight

**By Jim Workman**

Assistant Managing Editor

Prospect League commissioner David Chase is in his first season with the league.

The veteran of 30 plus years in baseball is in town today, making his first visit to observe the West Virginia Miners organization.

He'll also witness the Miners take on the Butler (Pa.) Blue Sox at Linda K. Epling Stadium.

The first pitch is slated at 7:05 p.m.

"We're both rookies, how's that?" Chase said with a laugh. "I'll be in Beckley, so I look forward to seeing the ballpark. I'm looking forward to seeing the fans. In my other stops across the league, the fans have been incredible. They're excited. Hopefully some of them will come by and say 'Hello' and let me know what they like. I'm looking forward to it."

His impressions — from a distance — have been more than favorable.

"I really like the professionalism of the staff," Chase said. "(Miners general manager) Mike Gilligan has been incredible communicating with us about what's going on. The approach in Beckley has been good."

The Prospect League certainly showed a lot of confidence in Beckley when it awarded the league's 2011 All-star game to the Miners this past off-season — before the first regular season game was even played at Linda K. Epling Stadium.

"That was something that a lot of leagues don't do," Chase admitted. "They usually want you to have a few seasons under your belt before you get the All-star game. We did have some competition in the league for the 2011 game, but we were also driven by the fact that we wanted to have it in the East (division) and we've had it in the West the last two years. The Miners put together a comprehensive proposal and they got the majority of the votes."

"It will give us a chance to wave the flag pretty high and claim Linda K. Epling Stadium as a flagship for the Prospect League. Hopefully it will lure even more people to our league."

Other cities looking to land a Prospect League team should pay close attention to Beckley, Chase said.

“There are some potential owners out there, about a half a dozen or more, that would like to get into our league,” he stated. “We really see Beckley as being kind of the poster child for us. We can hold it up and say ‘Here’s what a community can do’ — in terms of baseball, serving the community, giving the players a great place to play and the fans a great place to watch the game.”

Before Chase was selected as the Commissioner of the Prospect League, he most recently served as President/General Manager of the St. Louis Cardinals Class AAA affiliate Memphis Redbirds of the Pacific Coast League. He also worked in various roles for Baseball America magazine including Publisher and President. His professional baseball career began in 1978 as Assistant General Manager of the then Class AA Savannah Braves.

While with Memphis, Chase worked extensively with Major League Baseball to create MLB’s Annual Civil Rights Game with the first two years being played in Memphis’ AutoZone Park.

Chase pointed to some of the challenges that the league faces.

“One of our challenges is our geography,” he said. “We’re as far East as Pittsburgh, as far West as Hannibal, Missouri, North to Lorain County, Ohio and South to Nashville. That’s a pretty large footprint for a college summer league. We need to fill that in a little bit. Not so much in the West, probably more in the East. We have travel concerns. We have to look at our umpire development program. We want to make sure that those parts of the game are keeping up with the talent of our players.

“We have front offices that are relatively new to the business of baseball. What’s going to set us apart from the rest of the summer leagues is how well we treat our fans, how well we treat our players and how well we treat each other. So we have to get our operations fully up to speed. We have to treat our players well because that’s the best marketing for future players. They’ll go back to their universities and let their teammates know how well they were treated in the Prospect League. Our league is only a few years old, so we have some catching up to do. But we have owners that are dedicated to success.”

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