A Grand Slam of Community and Culture

April 15, 2026

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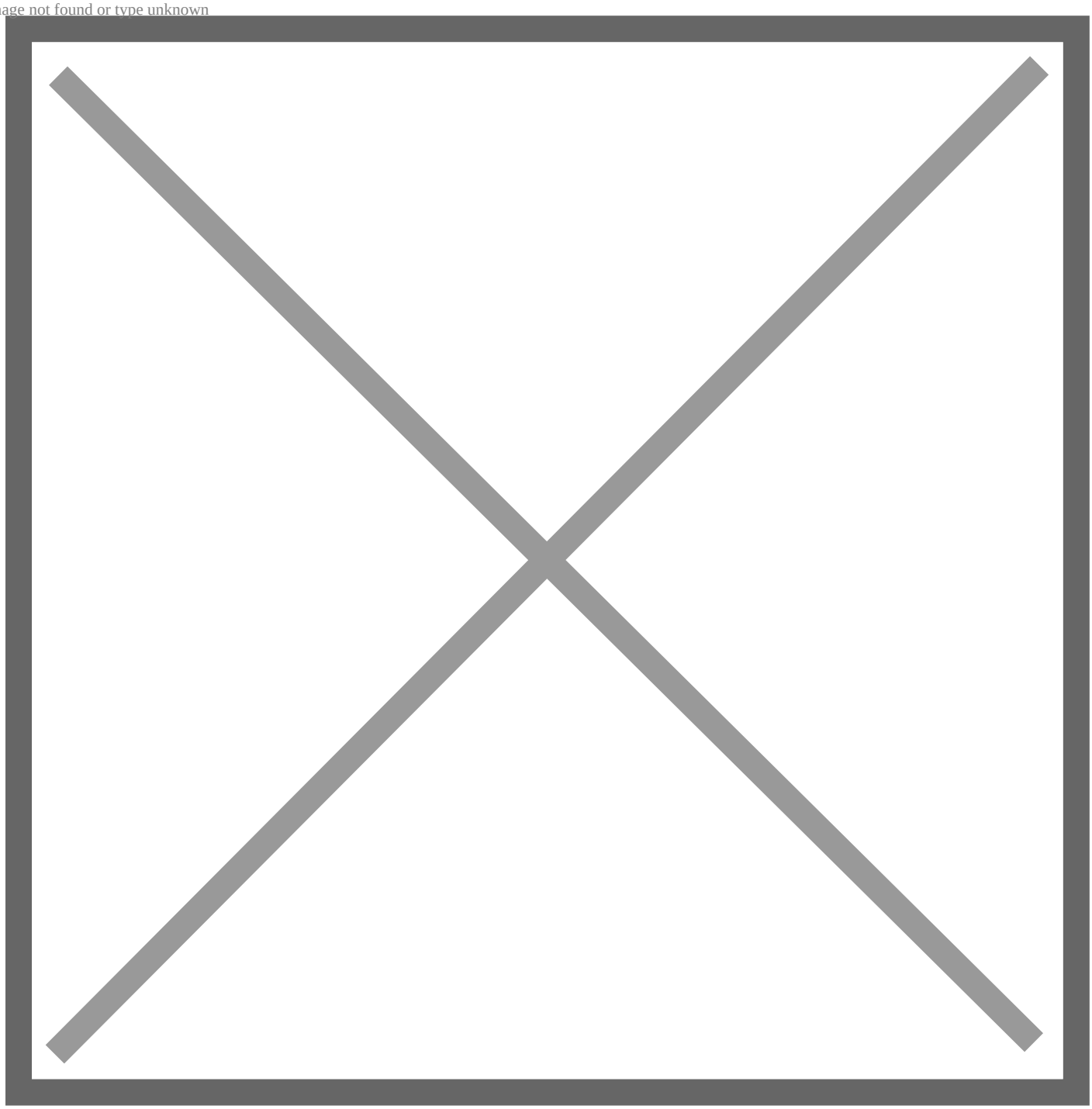


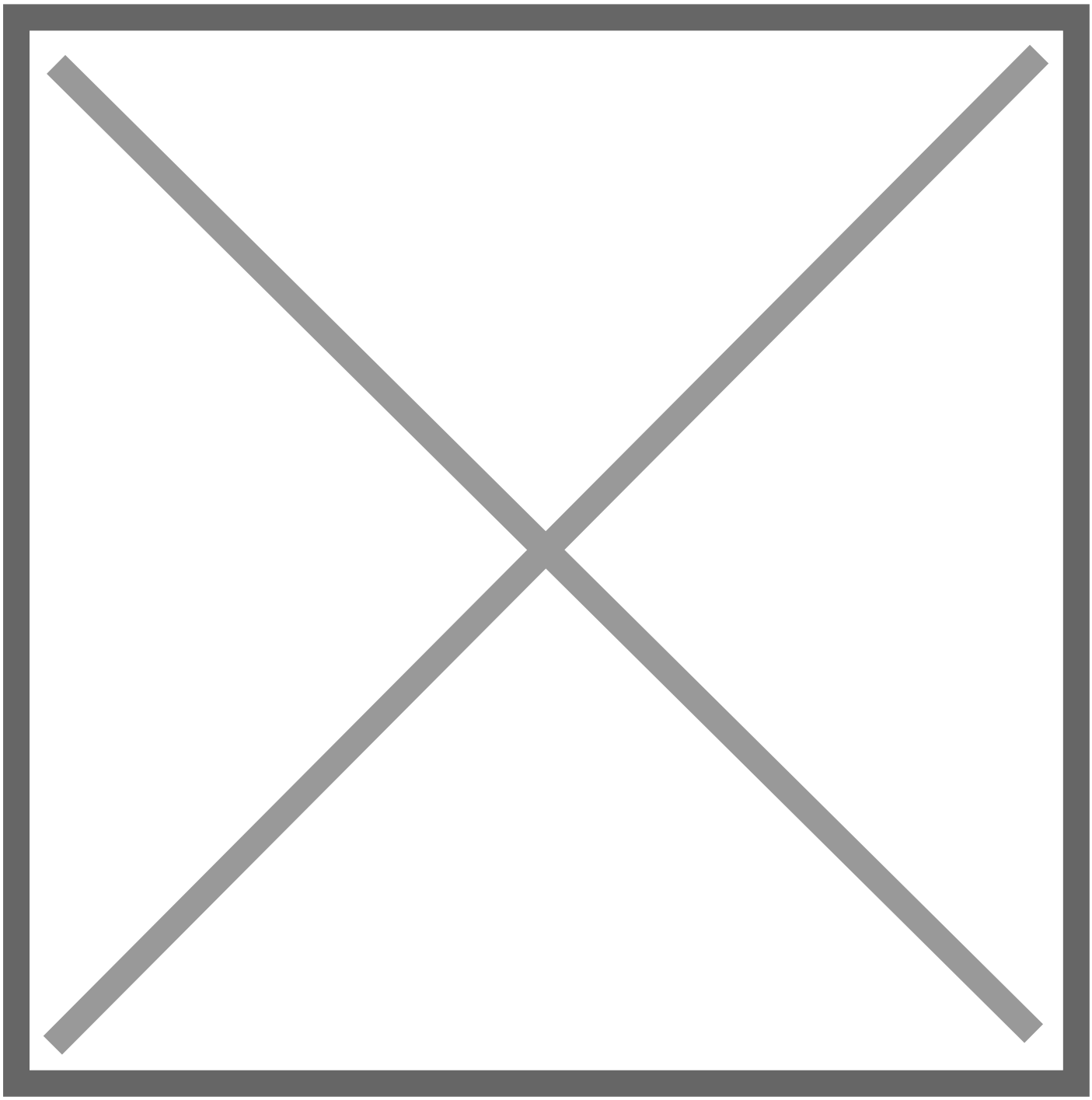
In the heart of Alabama, where baseball legends like Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, and Ozzie Smith once made their mark, a new chapter was written—bridging cultures, communities and a shared passion for the game.

The Rocket City Trash Pandas, the Double-A Affiliate of the Los Angeles Angels, hosted a three-day Global Baseball Series at Toyota Field that highlighted fun and fellowship while celebrating both cultures.

Taking the field with the Trash Pandas were The Toyota Red Cruisers, Toyota Motor Corporation's official corporate baseball team, who traveled to Alabama for the week-long series.

Games

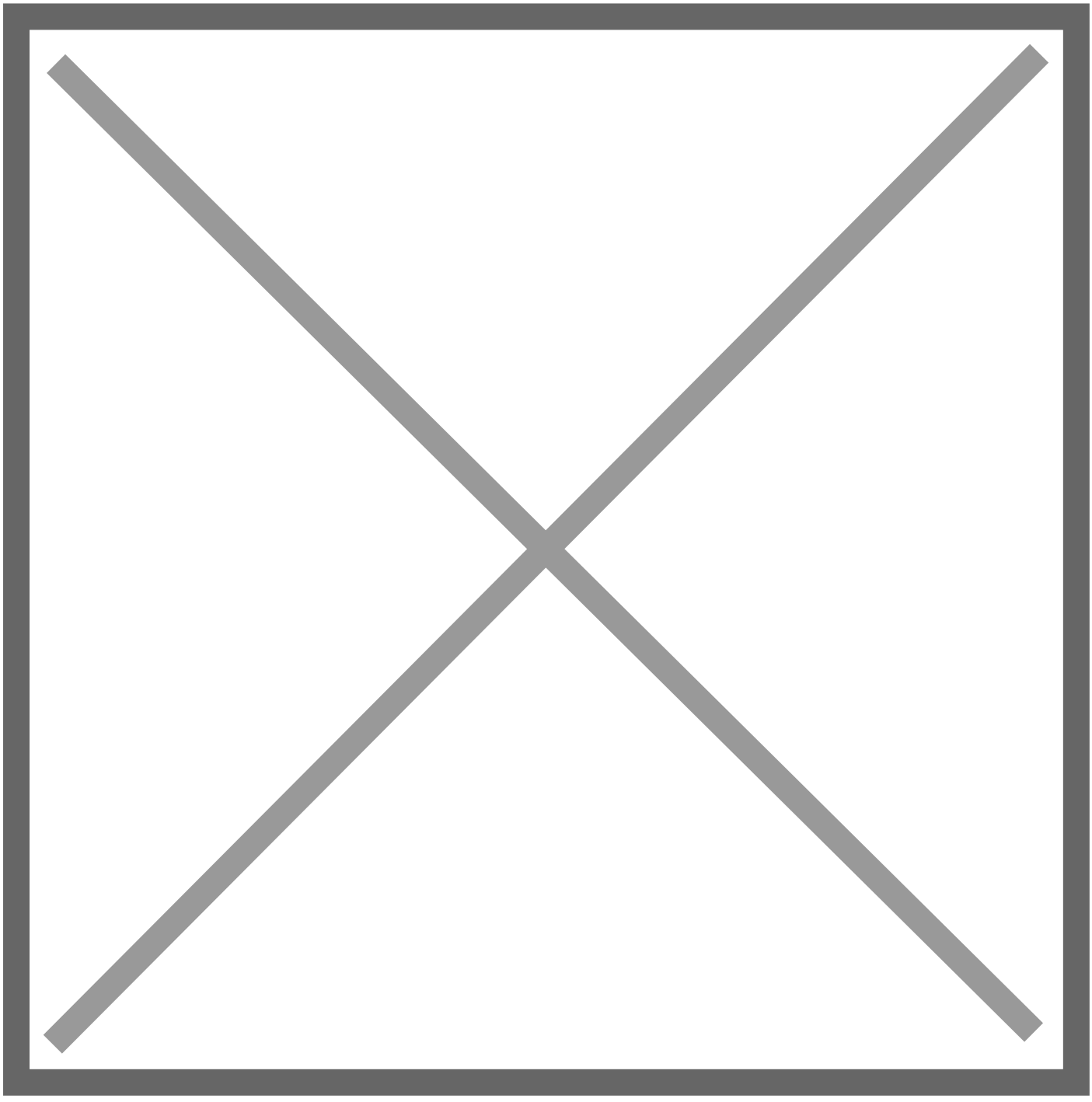
- March 30 – Toyota Red Cruisers vs. Alabama A&M University (13-3)
- March 31 – Rocket City Trash Pandas vs. University of Alabama in Huntsville (1-0)
- April 1 – Rocket City Trash Pandas vs. Toyota Red Cruisers (6-3)



Cherry Blossom Tree Planting
Before the Trash Pandas and Red Cruisers faced off, a ceremonial Cherry Blossom tree planting took center stage.

Donated by Toyota, the trees marked the start of the Global series and carried a deeper meaning. They symbolize unity, shared excitement, and the start of a new baseball season.

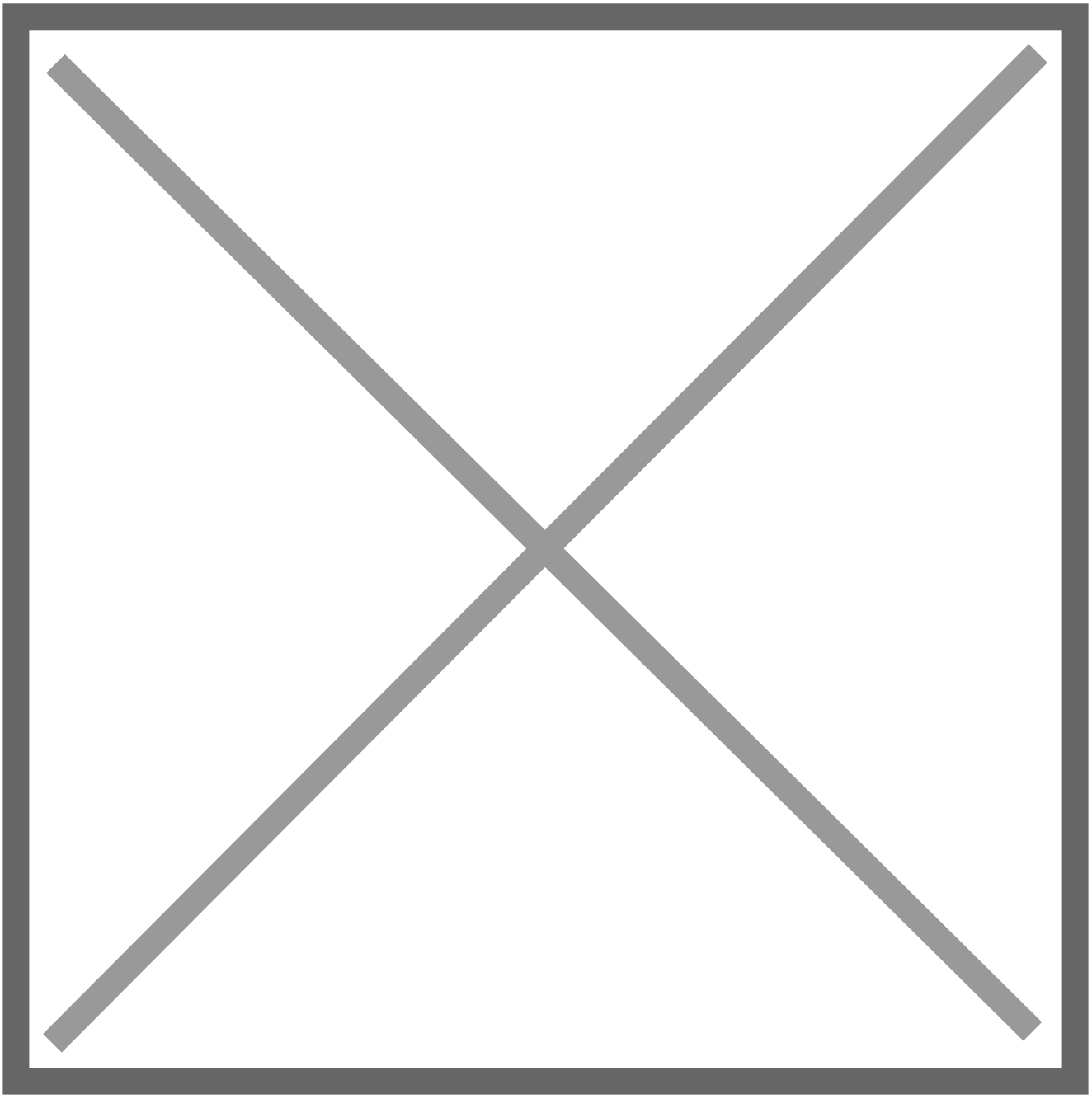
The Cherry Blossoms will stand as a lasting symbol of the friendship and the growing bond between Japan and North Alabama.



First Pitch

Ted Ogawa, CEO/President of Toyota Motor North America, was first to the plate, stepping onto the field to throw the first pitch.

More than 4,000 fans filled the stadium, chanting “Ogawa” as he prepared to throw the first pitch. After months of anticipation, the ballpark was filled with excitement, setting the tone for a great night of baseball.



Red Cruisers Visit Toyota Alabama

From the ballfield to the manufacturing floor, the Red Cruisers visited Toyota Alabama the morning after the game, getting an inside look at plant that builds nearly 1.5 million engines and differentials each year.

Producing engines for nearly half the Toyota vehicles built in North America, the plant also assembles differentials, crucial components that ensure the smooth and safe handling of Toyota’s legendary trucks and SUVs. With a recent expansion, Toyota Alabama represents a $1.7 billion investment in the region.

The team asked questions and experienced firsthand the work happening inside Toyota’s largest engine producer in North America. They also learned how the plant has expanded over the past 25 years, growing alongside the Huntsville community.

