

Taking time to give back



The 12U Parkview Panthers Travel Baseball Team: Back row (l-r): **Coaches Jon Caskey, Pete Hood, Malcolm McCoy**; Middle row (l-r): **Ryan Blanton, Sam McCoy, Kurt Hickman, Blake Gray, Clink Frazier, Zach Moon, Mason Caskey, Hunter Thornton, Coaches Mike Thornton, Mark Frazier and Robert Youngblood**; Front row (l-r): **Rob Youngblood, J.B. Rumbaugh, Jarrett Hood** Special photo

By Jessica Turner
Jessica@winnettcitizen.com

LILBURN- When you ask any 12-year-old baseball player what he would like to be doing on a Saturday morning, chances are his response will be playing baseball or sleeping in! But for one team of future baseball stars out of Mountain Park, their answers might just be a little bit different

these days.

The reason why is because of a trip to the Grayson Athletic Association's Special Needs Program.

"We had played games out at Bay Creek Park and had seen their special needs field," Mark Frazier, Head Coach of the 12 and under Parkview Panthers Travel Baseball Team, says. "I asked my friend Kevin Gaines, coach of the 12 and

under team at Grayson, about the program. He told me that I needed to arrange for my team to go participate in a Buddy Game."

Frazier made the call to Randy Neil, Special Needs Program Director at Bay Creek Park. "The Buddy Game is where we match our GAA teams with a Special Needs team to help with plays and running the bases," Neil says. The Special Needs players range in age from five to adult and are of varying skill levels from anything goes to competitive. The program has players that are mentally, physically, visually and hearing impaired, and while not all the players are physically limited, many use wheelchairs or walkers. "To have a coach from outside of our organization call and volunteer, was just incredible for us."

And the experience was just as incredible for Frazier's team as well. "All of our kids, parents, coaches, they just had a blast," he says. "We've gotten more out of that one day that I could have ever imagined. At first, our kids were a little cautious in helping but by the end of the day, they were fighting over chances to help."

During a game following their trip to Bay Creek Park, the Panthers were feeling down. Trailing in the fifth inning, one of the players made a little speech, Frazier says. "He said, 'Let's get out there and win this one for the kids at Bay Creek.' Would

you believe we came back and won that game? That is just a testament in itself to the power that experience had on our team."

But their giving didn't end there. When the end of season came around, it was by an overwhelming response that the team wanted to forgo the usual team trophies and coaches gifts and instead, donate that money to the GAA Special Needs Program.

"I was deeply moved when I found out about the donation," Neil says. "We are so fortunate to have people like the Parkview Panthers team and Mark Frazier in our community. To see boys at such a young age being so giving to others is just amazing to me. From top to bottom, our pro-

gram relies heavily on volunteers and contributions from the community and the dedication of this team shows just how powerful one experience with our program can be."

"If we would have gotten nothing else from our experience at Bay Creek Park, it was a chance for us to all stop and give back," Frazier says. "You realize just how blessed we all really are. If any team has a chance to participate in a Buddy Game, you will be so glad that you did, and be hooked like we are!"

For more information about the Grayson Athletic Association's Special Needs Program, visit them online at www.gaasports.org or www.gaaspecialneeds.com