All-star game puts Greenville in spotlight

Minor league contest Tuesday at Fluor Field

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For those in the baseball profession, days off are an in-season rarity. Summer fun, away from the ballpark, is even less common.

But for the 54 South Atlantic League All-Stars who will perform Tuesday at Fluor Field, today's emphasis will be on fun.

"I've never driven a BMW, and I've never ridden in a helicopter. I'm pretty excited about both," said Josh Zeid, a Connecticut native and Lakewood BlueClaws relief pitcher who plans to be part of both those activities today. "Getting away from baseball for a day is going to be fun."

SAL All-Star game

- Pre-game party today at 6:30 p.m. at the Wyche Pavilion
- First pitch: Tuesday, 7:15 p.m.
- Where: Fluor Field
- Home run derby: 6 p.m.
- Tickets: 864-240-4500

Zeid, a 23-year-old right-hander, is "excited and pretty nervous" about getting behind the wheel of a BMW — an experience scheduled for all 54 players. The helicopter rides over Greenville and surrounding mountains are also planned for today, along with an evening banquet at the Wyche Pavilion that will enable the players to meet fans.

Zeid is also looking forward to Tuesday's visit to the Greenville Children's Hospital. "I can usually crack a joke, and I like being around the kids," says Zeid. "I actually enjoy going to the hospitals."

For Greenville Drive catcher Dan Butler, a Phoenix native and former University of Arizona player who has spent most of his 23 years in the Southwest, Monday's holiday is a chance to experience Greenville County in a new way.

"It's cool to be able to see some things I've heard about," said Butler, who earned his spot on the team by hitting .310 in the first half of the season. "I feel blessed to be in a city that has fun things to do. It's a cool feeling to know you're in a place where there's a nice ballpark and a lot of community pride. It makes you appreciate it more."

The community pride runs especially strong this week for Drive general manager Mike deMaine, now in his fifth year in Greenville.

"This is our chance to show off the ballpark, the town, our fans, and show people around the league what Greenville is all about," DeMaine said.

He expects "about 500-600" fans to arrive from out of town for the event, and expects most of the 5,700 Fluor Field seats to be filled for the game.

At the BMW facility, the players will get the tour of the BMW manufacturing plant, the Zentrum museum, and the chance to drive various BMW models.

On Tuesday, about 30 of the All-Stars, representing the North and South Divisions of the 16-team South Atlantic League, will be at the Greenville Country Club's Riverside Course at 8 a.m. to play a round of golf with youngsters who are part of the "First Tee" — an organization that enables underprivileged children to get golfing experience.

The rest of the all-stars will spend the morning at the Greenville Children's Hospital, where they will sign autographs.

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