World Series host families' hospitality paying dividends

Southern charm is bringing some back to area during off-season

By Julie Howle
STAFF WRITER
jhowle@greenvillenews.com



BART BOATWRIGHT / Staff

Central host family members, from left, Chris and Alan Schaff, along with their daughter Taylor, cheer on their team as they play the Southwest during the Big League World Series at the J.B. Red Owens Sports Complex in Easley.

Alan Schaff and his family of four have grown a bit this week — by 21, to be exact.

"It's a very rewarding experience for us," said Schaff, who along with his wife, Chris, is host family coordinator for the Big League Baseball World Series. "We get to know the players and the boys that come. ... We get to interact with them every day."

Schaff, his wife and their children are serving as a host family for the Big League Baseball World Series for the fourth year and have welcomed a team of 17 kids and four coaches from Illinois District 15.

This is the ninth straight year that Easley has hosted the event, one that gives the local economy a weeklong boost and, as the Schaffs have learned, can pay dividends later.

Alan Schaff said host families are important because they help show the state's Southern hospitality, an effort that has paid off with some families returning to the area for off-season visits.

"We try to give it a little bit of a Southern flavor to give them a different experience," Schaff said. "We've stayed in touch with a lot of them over the years."

A host family acts as a liaison for the team — helping coaches know where to be when and arranging activities like tours of the athletic facilities at Clemson or trips to a local lake or mall — and for the families of players and coaches.

"They don't know anything about the area," Schaff said, describing how host families can help with anything from suggestions for restaurants to answering any questions the new arrivals have. "It gives them a friendly face to stay in contact with."

Jon Humphrey, tournament director for the Big League Baseball World Series, said there are 11 host families — one for each team — who act as tour guides of sorts.

Five international and six U.S. teams compete in the World Series, and players are ages 16 to 18.

The Big League Baseball World Series started last Wednesday and wraps up this Wednesday at the J.B. "Red" Owens Recreation Complex.

The Schaff family greeted their team early last week at the airport, and Schaff said his and many other host families gave players goody bags that can have everything from chewing gum and sunflower seeds to playing cards.

And "every year we've had the team over to our house for a dinner," he said. "Typically we'll do a Lowcountry boil for them."