

Jack, Chapman-Mays voted 4A All-State



MADDOX JACK
NCBCA 4A All-State Baseball



MASON CHAPMAN-MAYS
NCBCA 4A All-State Baseball

Alexander Central High School Baseball standouts Mason Chapman-Mays and Maddox Jack have earned NC Baseball Coaches Association 4A All State accolades after their stellar campaigns in 2022. Chapman-Mays is a rising senior at ACHS, while Jack will be starting his junior year at the school this fall. The 2022 NCBCA All State Teams are selected by coaches from across the state. This year, the 4A coaches in North Carolina voted Providence pitcher Eli Jerzembeck the 4A Pitcher of the Year, while DH Conley's Matthew Matthjis was voted the 4A Player of the Year.

The Caleb Benfield Challenge held at Bethlehem Fire Dept.

By ANGELA FARR KING

June 19-25 was a busy time at the Bethlehem Fire Department. These were the dates for the Caleb Benfield Challenge, a week-long camp held on site at the fire department, in memory of Caleb Benfield, a Bethlehem firefighter, who passed away on October 10, 2012.



CALEB BENFIELD

Bob and Shelly Benfield, Caleb's parents, initially held the camp to memorialize Caleb, knowing his passion for working with children. The Benfields started the Challenge in 2013, making this the tenth year (9th annual) for this amazing week of firefighting camp. Shelly Benfield explained that they hold one fundraiser, which is a motorcycle poker run, and they receive donations to keep the Challenge going. There is NO cost to the participants for the entire week.

Shelly explained that they vary the schedule from year to year so that returners don't repeat all of the same activities. The camp is open to students ages 14-17 and always

begins on a Sunday with an orientation. The junior firefighters stay in bunks at the firehouse and are each assigned a teammate. They are responsible for all firehouse duties for the week, including cooking, cleaning, and daily fire equipment checks. They begin each day with physical training and receive at least 60 hours of firefighter training throughout the week. This year, they also took time to visit the Firefighters Museum in Conover and spent an evening of fun and team building at Bo's Family Entertainment Center in Lenoir.

Each year, junior firefighters participate in fire challenges daily with senior firefighters supervising. They always follow a format of classroom first as they are taught basic skills. Then they participate in hands-on learning, keeping all state safety standards in check at all times. Shelly explained that under normal circumstances, these junior firefighters could not do these intense trainings, but because they have so many senior firefighters who give their time, they are able to participate in very realistic life-saving scenarios.

All of the participants wear full turnout gear during activities and are constantly checked for normal vital signs and hydration. Some senior firefighters feel so passionate about sharing their knowledge that they take their yearly vacation times to participate with these junior firefighters. The firehouse can

house up to 14 students and this year they hosted 10. Advertisement for the Challenge is mainly by word of mouth. Shelly explained that this year most students were local, but they often get junior firefighters from all over the state.

The group was broken into teams this year called "Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, and Echo." Each team was responsible for completing a small research project about one of the five areas of firefighting. They presented their research projects publicly to parents at the final banquet on the final day of the Challenge.

Bob and Shelly Benfield share 8 children together and she said that all of them are involved in fire and rescue in some way. Her son and daughter-in-law, Joshua and Sierra Benfield, from Burke County, took their vacations to spend the week at the Challenge to help supervise the junior firefighters.

Shelly recounted the day that Caleb died as an ordinary day for Caleb serving as a Senior Firefighter. She said that Caleb had been a Junior Firefighter, but had recently turned 18 in August of 2012, qualifying him as a Senior Firefighter. It was the first week in October so Caleb was busy preparing and teaching students from Bethlehem Elementary about Fire Prevention. Students from the elementary school had been bussed to the fire department and there were learning stations set up in the parking lot.

Caleb had to run an errand home on his motorcycle and was killed on his way back to the fire department. It is suspected that someone ran him off the road. Shelly pointed to the spot where Caleb was killed because it can be seen from the fire department. The Bethlehem Fire Department crew responded to the accident, not knowing it was one of their own.

Shelly said that all of the firefighters followed Caleb to the hospital and were a huge support during this tragedy. Caleb's funeral was held at Tricity Baptist Church, with over 2,000 people in attendance and a caravan of 300 motorcycles to honor him.

She said that Caleb loved the firefighter life. He was also a lifeguard at the YMCA and worked at Lowe's Grocery Store in Bethlehem. He had a big personality and would have graduated from homeschool in 2013. He was actively involved in Bethlehem

Baptist Church as well.

Although their grief is still very real, the Benfields have chosen to honor their son by implementing the Caleb Benfield Challenge yearly. They work hard during the week to make sure the participants have all that they need. They stock the kitchen, plan the schedules and the menus. They are onsite to oversee the students all week, along with Chief Ashley Starnes, his crew, and other firefighter volunteers.

Chief Starnes said that they are "training the future." He said that they will take participants from any county and that all levels of Emergency Services are involved, including the Sheriff's Department, Alexander County EMS, and the NC Forest Service.

Jacob Little, age 17, said this was his fourth time attending the Challenge. He is from the Oxford Fire Department and said he comes for "the challenges and the brotherhood."

Maddox Reese, age

14, said this was his first time attending. He is from the Bethlehem Fire Department and said he came to "have fun with friends and experience it all together."

Scott Brinkley, age 17, from the Conover Fire Department, said that he came to "better himself as a firefighter and as a person. I'm trying to give back."

It is clear that Caleb Benfield's passion for firefighting is being passed down to future generations through this wonderful yearly experience for junior firefighters. They won't all become firefighters for life, but many of them will serve in emergency services of some kind. The Benfields and the brotherhood at the Bethlehem Fire Department have taken the tragedy of Caleb's death and ensured that his legacy will live on in the lives of future public servants. Their training and passion for life-saving services will have lasting positive impacts on their communities.



TAKING PART IN THE CHALLENGE — Junior Firefighters take part in car door removal training during the Caleb Benfield Challenge. The heavy presence of senior firefighters makes it possible for junior firefighters to participate in this hands-on, life-saving training.

Activities planned at Bethlehem Branch Library

The Bethlehem Branch of the library is buzzing with activity. On Monday mornings, preschool children are dancing and listening to Miss Amy's story time. On Tuesdays from 4-5 p.m., patrons can read to therapy dog Abby. The Summer Reading Program is in full swing so that people of all ages can track their reading minutes. Clearly, there is a lot happening for children at this little branch, but Glenda Leonard, the Bethlehem Branch Manager, plans other activities for all ages:

- Beginning July 14, on Thursdays from 10:00-11:00 a.m., there will be inside yoga courses offered. Patrons are reminded to bring their own mats, dress accordingly, and wear

appropriate clothing. A \$5 donation is asked to pay the instructor.

- Wednesday mornings from 9:00-11:00 a.m. coffee and refreshments are offered for reading and relaxation.
- On Thursday, July 28, the branch will host an event presented by "Wine and Design." This will be from 6:00-8:30 p.m. and participants must pre register online.

There are Canasta groups and knitting groups meeting and there will be an upcoming showing of the movie "Babe" for families to watch with popcorn and drinks. For more information about these events and others, contact the Bethlehem Branch of the



STORYTIME AT THE LIBRARY — Miss Amy Froneberger is shown leading preschool story time at the Bethlehem Branch Library. This group meets at 10:00 a.m. on Mondays.

library at 828-495-8753. The Bethlehem Branch is located at 45 Rink Dam Road in Hickory.

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