

First baseman Lance Berkman greets Humble ISD students

Monday, September 28, 2009

Kathy Parks

Houston Astros become first Texas major-league team to "get on the bus"



Excitement filled the air last Friday as Humble ISD parents and students from Lakeland Elementary boarded a school bus bound for Minute Maid Park. Prior to the Houston Astros Sept. 25 game against Cincinnati, Houston Astro first baseman Lance Berkman greeted students and posed for photos in front of the bus bearing an advertisement purchased by the Astros.

"The Houston Astros are the first major-league sports team to advertise on a Texas school bus," said Cynthia Calvert, president of Steep Creek Media. "Go Astros!" she added.

Calvert said the "Get on the Bus" advertising program generates great exposure for advertisers and provides revenue for Humble ISD and a number of other Houston-area districts. All the districts are putting the money into their general operating funds.

"We couldn't be happier that the Astros were the first professional team to 'get on the bus' and offered this great opportunity for Humble ISD students," Calvert said.

The eight signs feature Lance Berkman, a five-time All-Star who holds the National League record for the most single-season "runs batted ins" as a switch-hitter. Berkman agreed to meet the kids and pose for photos after practice Friday afternoon.



The Astros provided 40 tickets to Friday's game; 20 Lakeland Elementary fifth-graders and numerous chaperones loaded up and rode one of the eight Humble ISD buses with an Astro sign downtown.

Their bus pulled into the VIP parking at the front of the stadium. The students all wore their Lakeland Elementary T-shirts and waved Lance Berkman baseball trading cards donated to each of the students by Duffy Burnett.

Humble ISD police donated lanyards so each of the students could wear ID badges to the game. One Humble ISD parent, Lori Herndon, loved the idea of giving the students a memory of a lifetime and donated \$275 to cover the students' visit to the concession area. Friends of Herndon said that she wanted to do her part to make sure the kids had a really good time at the game.

"I'm really excited to see Lance Berkman and to go to the game," said 10-year-old Jayden Calfee.

Calfee said he wrote a strong essay on baseball and was chosen to ride the bus. He said he owns a collection of baseball cards and has several of Berkman's.

"We're so excited about the game," said student Ahmad Jelks, who admitted basketball was his favorite sport, but added that he enjoyed baseball and thought it was a "nice thing" for the Astros to help his school.

The bus advertising benefits school districts, whose administrators are grateful for the additional revenue; taxpayers, who feel relief from the need for rising property taxes; students, whose programs are funded; and advertisers, whose business receive daily exposure throughout the area.

"Everyone wins with this," said Calvert.

The Houston Astros are using the bus advertising to support local schools and promote their team and individual players.

"Running the ads makes good sense," said Jennifer Germer, vice president of marketing for the Astros. "It is good for business and it's good for the community."

Humble ISD hired local company Steep Creek Media to manage the advertising campaign a year ago. Funds generated by the advertising go to a variety of operating expenses including

teacher salaries. Since then, Steep Creek Media has contracted with a half dozen more districts across Houston, with more on the way.

"We are in the preliminary stages of expanding in Texas," Calvert said. "Advertisers really love the 'new' advertising medium of a bright yellow bus. Their ads have high visibility in a unique place. These are seven-foot moving billboards."

After the photos with the baseball star and a moment for the kids to thank the team for their support, the students headed into the game.

"We are terrifically excited to have our students from Lakeland Elementary meet Lance Berkman and see the game. All of Humble ISD students will benefit from the Houston Astros being such a generous patron of our 'Get on The Bus' advertising program. It will be a great memory for the students and we are thankful to the Astros and to Lance Berkman for their support," said Dr. Guy Sconzo, superintendent of Humble ISD.

"Lance Berkman rocks!" said student Jose Guerra.

Guerra said he is a big Astros fan and already has a collection of Berkman cards. He said his uncle is also a fan and keeps Guerra up to date on how the team is playing.

To learn more about the Houston Astros, visit www.astros.com. To learn about school bus advertising, visit www.SteepCreekMedia.com or call 281-962-4390.

Photos: Students from Lakeland Elementary surround the Astros' Lance Berkman, center left, and Humble ISD Superintendent Dr. Guy Sconzo, center right, as they stand by one of the eight buses bearing Astros advertising. Photos by Kathy Parks



© 2011 Ourtribune.com