

# Junior Giants taking a swing at SLT youth



Junior Giants is making its South Lake Tahoe debut this year. Photo/Provided

**By Jessie Marchesseau**

This summer, South Lake Tahoe youth will have the opportunity to participate in a new, free, non-competitive baseball program.

The city has been chosen to host one of nearly a hundred Junior Giants baseball leagues across Northern California, Nevada and Oregon. The program, designed to provide a safe and positive outdoor activity for children, is fully funded by the Giants Community Fund with San Francisco Giants catcher Buster Posey serving as the program's commissioner.

However, this is not your average baseball league. The Junior Giants program focuses just as much, if not more, on building character as it does on playing baseball.

There will be skills, drills and baseball fundamentals, but each week of the eight-week season will also have another theme, one focused on important life lessons. Players will learn about topics such as leadership, confidence, teamwork, bullying, reading and healthy lifestyles. They will complete take-home projects and have the opportunity to earn prizes and Giants swag. Families will even have opportunities to attend San Francisco Giants games at AT&T Park.

The Giants Community Fund ensures the program is free for each and every child by providing all the necessary equipment for the league, from pitching machines and bases, to gloves, hats and T-shirts. In addition, they provide books and materials for the weekly programs as well as prizes and incentives such as school supplies, backpacks, water bottles and Giants bobble heads.



There is more to the youth program than playing baseball. Photo/Provided

The non-competitive aspect also makes Junior Giants different from most baseball leagues. Games will have no umpires, no score-keeping and no winners or losers. Every child will get

to hit, everyone will get to field. The goal is to take the stress out of the game, creating a more positive and fun experience.

“The main thing is we want every kid to have the opportunity to play regardless of their income level or skill level,” Junior Giants coordinator Bailey West said.

West has been working closely with Lauren Thomaselli, recreation manager for the city and the South Lake Tahoe commissioner for the Junior Giants, in getting the program set up. South Lake Tahoe is one of only four communities chosen to join the program this year. West said the Junior Giants try to choose new communities where they find a strong parks and recreation partner, but also where they see a population of kids who wouldn't otherwise have an opportunity to participate.

Practices will be once a week after 5:30pm and games will be on Saturdays. This schedule is designed to make it easier for working parents to shuttle their kids to and from events, and to participate themselves.

Since the program is so reliant on adult volunteers to coach, assist and act as team parents, West said they try to offer plenty of services and incentives to them as well. The Giants Community Fund provides free training, supplies and regional coaching clinics for adults willing to serve as coaches. There is even a day at AT&T Park where the San Francisco Giants honor the Junior Giants coaches.

Thomaselli estimates they will need 10 to 12 adult coaches willing to dedicate two to three hours per week to their teams. The number of kids is only limited by the number of coaches available.

“It is free, it is fun, it's a great way to get your kids outdoors and surrounded by a positive message and learn the fun game of baseball,” Thomaselli said.



The program targets youth who may not otherwise have a chance to play baseball. Photo/Provided

The Junior Giants is open to boys and girls ages 5-13 and will have both t-ball and baseball teams. The season will run from June 15 to Aug. 6, culminating in a season finale celebration with a family barbecue, baseball games and awards ceremony.

Players, coaches and volunteers may **register online** or in person at the following locations:

- South Lake Tahoe Recreation & Swim Complex, 1180 Rufus Allen Blvd.  
Until June 1, Monday-Saturday, 8am-6pm
- Boys and Girls Club, 1100 Lyons Ave.  
March 23 and April 6, 4-5:30pm
- Boys and Girls Club, Bijou School, 3501 Spruce Ave.  
March 31 and April 28, 4-5:30pm.