

William Hardeman

throws first pitch at Texas Rangers game

BY MELISSA BARNHART

As mom, dad and brother Peighton look on, William, 4, takes to the pitcher's mound to do what most men can only dream of - throwing the first

pitch at a Texas Rangers game. The weather was drizzly, but William's first throw brought

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the Texas Rangers an abundance of good fortune as they went on to blow the Kansas City Royals out of the park with a 9-8 victory in Tuesday night's game.

William is an adorable and photogenic young boy with intellect and extensive communication skills to boot. At first glance you wouldn't know that in his young life, William has faced several challenges in order to compensate and adapt to the obstacles his body puts him through on a daily basis.

Living with cerebral palsy means William faces a daily struggle due to an inability to get his muscles to relax and move. Twice a week, Scarlet, his physical therapist, comes to his home to perform physical exercises on his muscles, and keeps his parents informed on the latest treatments and most recent information about the disease. His parents, Wendy and Devon, have tried alternative therapies such as Botox injections and say they had a difficult time with the treatment. "We didn't see a huge benefit and it was a hard procedure for not much benefit," explained Wendy.

Although cerebral palsy was first identified in the 1860s many of us are uninformed and



Dennis Rothermich photos

have misconceptions about the disease. "A lot of people ask if he's cognitively ok, they think cerebral palsy means mentally handicapped," said Devon. "He's

happy, he's healthy and he does things just like everybody else," Wendy said. "Cerebral palsy is a huge umbrella and it effects children in many ways."

It was through William's physical therapist that his parents learned about Variety, the Children's Charity of North Texas, and met Lawrence

"Lance" W. Hood Jr. the executive director of the charity. Established locally in 1935 by Claude Ezell, the charity assists north Texas families who need assistance in procuring mobility equipment, or products and services that will improve the quality of their children's lives.

William's family was a perfect match for Variety. Both Devon and Wendy have full-time jobs, have insurance and another child in their family that they care for. Although they have insurance, William's wheelchair and walker would only be partially covered, leaving his parents to pick up the rest of the tab. This is where Variety stepped in and paid the remaining portion of the cost of William's walker and wheelchair through their *Heart of Variety Fund* and *Kids on the Go!*

"William's family is the perfect example of who we're trying to help. They are active members of their community, both are full-time employees and both have insurance. We're here to help those doing their best to provide for their families," said Lance W. Hood Jr. executive director of Variety.

Variety was able to provide William with a wheelchair that can be adjusted to adapt to his height, weight and performance needs. Wendy and Devon's experience with Variety has been overwhelmingly positive.

"Lance is so personable, enthusiastic, friendly and easy to talk with. The process was expeditious and Variety provided us with someone who could put the wheelchair together and adjust it to fit William," Wendy said.

Wendy and Devon are grateful for the freedom that has been given to their son through Variety and their program opportunities. Not only is William mobile, but he and his family got the opportunity to meet members of their favorite baseball team. The family attends Texas Ranger's games as often as possible and believes that baseball is the most "family friendly" sport to attend because it's fun, affordable and provides great entertainment.

You can watch William round the bases in late September when the new season of Buddy League begins. As for big brother Peighton, he'll be dropping his bat for a while to run a few touch downs in his first year as a football player.

If you're interested in learning more about Variety the Children's Charity of North Texas, you can contact their local office by calling 214-560-2263 or e-mail at varietynorthtexas.org. Variety is located at 3102 Oak Lawn Ave. Suite 700 Dallas, Texas, 75219.

