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Former Major Leaguers host clinic at Mingus



Dave Hilton gives Little Leaguers fielding tips on Thursday at the aps All-Stars clinic at Mingus Union. Hilton played infielder in the Major Leagues in the 1970s for the San Diego Padres. (VVN/James Kelley)

By **James Kelley**  [jameskelley520](#)

Originally Published: July 1, 2017 1:14 p.m.

Verde Valley kids got a taste of the majors on Thursday as the aps All-Stars clinic came to Cottonwood for the first time.

Led by Ken Phelps, the aps All-Stars hold free clinics throughout the state and in Farmington, New Mexico, a city that the Arizona Public Service Electric Company also handles.

They've been doing the clinics since 1998.

"It's evolved, it's had a few different names to it, it's just part of our community outreach program at aps and I'm the lucky one who gets to run it," Phelps said. "We try to give something back to those communities when we can."

The clinics are tied in with a school or another local entity like Boys & Girls Clubs.

Since this one was at Mingus Union, Phelps said they talked to the Marauders coaches about what they wanted to do.

The clinic attracted kids from all over Verde Valley, from six years old to high school seniors.

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“It’s just a great opportunity,” said Mingus Union JV baseball coach Tim McKeever Jr. “It’s guys that I was able to watch play when I was growing up and just a great opportunity for the kids to learn and the way we were able to bring in the Little Leaguers and stuff the way their schedule worked. It’s just a fantastic opportunity when you can learn from guys that played 15 years in the pros, that’s a pretty darn good coach.”

Although they hold their clinics all across the state — they even have them for the retirees at Sun City — they hadn’t been to Cottonwood yet.

Mingus alumnus and aps Community Affairs Manager Jenna Rowell (née Wright) helped make the connection. Phelps, who went to college at Arizona State, was also pleased to learn that Mingus Union head baseball coach Bob Young also played for the Sun Devils.

“Jenna said ‘we ought to look into Cottonwood’ and so I just picked up the phone and called the coach and it turns out that coach Young is a guy who played baseball at ASU, where I played as well, but it was after I played there, so it worked out pretty nice,” Phelps said. “Her family still lives here, so she comes back quite often

Phelps also went to Mesa Community College. He was a first baseman and played for the Royals, Expos, Mariners, Yankees, Athletics and Indians in the 1980s and 90s.

The other MLB alumni that coached at the clinic were Ron Davis, Lou Klimchock and Dave Hilton.

Davis was a pitcher who played for the Yankees, Twins, Cubs, Dodgers and Giants in the 1970s and 80s.

Hilton, an infielder, played for the Padres in the 1970s.

Klimchock, was an infielder who played for the Athletics, Braves, Senators, Mets and Indians in the 1950s and 60s. Klimchock, who is 77, even pitched batting practice to the kids.

Klimchock is the president of the Arizona Major League Alumni Association and well over 500 former MLB players live in the Valley of the Sun.

“So we just draw from those guys and a lot of them love to come and be a part of this,” Phelps said. “It’s just a great give back, for us it’s what we love to do and we also want to try and get aps out in the community and we try to let them know that we do a lot of free things for the communities that we serve as well and this is one way.”

Phelps is a community development and special projects consultant for aps.

The kids got t-shirts, autographed baseballs and pizza in addition to the coaching.

“Baseball’s a game of failure and so we remind them that ‘hey guys, you’re going to fail,’” Phelps said. “It’s nothing new, I’m sure coach Young is saying the same thing but it’s always nice to hear it from other people as well and guys that have played and had the same experiences that these guys had when we were little. So we talk about those things and they go hand in hand, if you want to be on the field, you have to do well in school.”

McKeever Jr. said he thinks the clinic will have a huge impact on the players.

“It’s a different voice,” McKeever Jr. said. “I mean every player gets used to hearing their coach talking about the same old things and kinda riding them about it and what was great is they were just saying things in a different way, so as long as they apply it, it’s going to help them out a ton.”

[Photo Gallery](#)

Aps All Stars Baseball Clinic Cottonwood



On Thursday at Mingus Union, the aps All-Stars staged a clinic for Verde Valley youth baseball players. aps' clinic was led by former Major Leaguers Ken Phelps, Ron Davis, Lou Klimchock and Dave Hilton.

The MLB alums wore uniforms of team they used to play for.

“A lot of times it’s a great way to get the players’ attention, they listen to us and respect the fact that we played at the highest level,” Phelps said.

McKeever Jr. said the clinic was a great way for the kids to finish their season.

“It’s something that we really enjoy because it helps keep us young, that’s one thing and as long as we can give something back,” Phelps said. “I think back when I was a kid, I never had anybody that played in the Major Leagues talk to me about it, how to play and teach us.”

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