

WITHERS:

continued from page A1

first year, Withers raised \$665.

“I wanted to help kids with sick hearts, and so that’s just what I did,” he said. “It feels great. I love it.”

Withers has continued to do the program every year since and has raised more money every year. This year, however, following the retirement of Cody and the hiring of a new teacher who hadn’t planned on doing the program, the school didn’t participate. That did not get in the way of Withers’ hopes to donate to the cause that has created so much joy. This year, Withers decided to do it on his own.

Withers, with the help of his mother, made a video about his efforts to raise money for the American Heart Association’s Jump Rope for Heart program. Gail Withers shared the video on her Facebook page so family and friends could see what he was trying to accomplish. Blake and his mother also visited businesses as far away as Tri-Cities, Washington, to see if people wanted to donate. Their efforts paid off more than they could ever imagine.

Despite the fact Blake and his mother missed two weeks of the scheduled four-week fundrais-

ing period because they were ill, they still raised more money than in previous years. At the end of the fundraising period, Blake Withers said they had raised \$3,002, which brought his total donations since his second-grade year to more than \$7,000.

His efforts did not go unnoticed by community members and officials from the American Heart Association, either. Withers received the Umatilla Lions Club “Acts of Kindness” award this year for his efforts. The American Heart Association is also sponsoring an overnight stay at a Portland hotel in April, and, the next day, Withers will attend a Trail Blazers game where his story will be shown during halftime. He and a few other children will jump rope in front of the crowd, as well.

“I’m excited for that,” Withers said smiling.

He said what makes his fundraising efforts so special is meeting people who have been impacted by heart disease.

Last week, when Gail Withers went to purchase her son a Guitar Hero game someone was selling, the woman she was going to buy the equipment from told her she wouldn’t accept her money because of Blake’s efforts.

“She had a little boy who died when he was 15 months of a heart condi-



MAEGAN MURRAY PHOTO

McNary Heights Elementary School fifth-grader Blake Wickers and his mother, Gail, look through donation amounts they received the last few weeks in Blake’s campaign to raise more than \$3,000 for the American Heart Association through Jump Rope for Heart this year.

tion,” Gail Withers said, as tears welled in both her and her sons’ eyes as they recalled the woman’s story.

Blake Withers said it

is moments like talking with the woman whose child had died of a heart problem that make him feel good about what he

is doing. He said he just wished he and his mother hadn’t gotten sick this year so they could have raised even more money.

“Imagine what we could have gotten in four weeks,” he said.

Gail Withers said for every \$50 donated, a child receives treatment for a heart condition, and, with the money her son raised through the years, more than 140 children have been treated. When he heard that number, Blake Withers said he couldn’t believe he has helped so many people.

“Wow, that is so cool,” he said. “I didn’t know it was that many.”

Blake Withers said, because this year’s fundraising campaign was so successful, he might continue in middle school.

“This year, with it being my last year in ele-

mentary school, we wanted to go out with a bang, but it might not be over,” he said.

Gail Withers said they haven’t yet committed to a time frame, but, because of their success fundraising in the last few years, they hope to continue.

“He’s able to soften people’s hearts because he just has the gump-tion,” she said. “We haven’t committed yet, but it could be a good thing to strive for.”

Blake Withers said he has continued to get better at jump roping, and, at his best, he can jump 50 consecutive times without stopping, even though he doesn’t practice regularly.

“Every once in a while, when I remember to get it out, I’ll take it outside and practice,” he said of his jump rope.

RATES:

continued from page A1

1,500 kilowatt hours, the total bill will increase from \$101.45 to \$112.50.

Non-residential customers will also see higher rates: average increases of 7.45 percent for small commercial customers, 11.84 percent for large commercial customers and 6.34 percent for irrigation customers, according to information from Rivera.

At a previous council meeting, Rivera said the increase was necessary to keep up with increasing wholesale power costs and to maintain and improve transmission lines. He said HES last adjusted its rates in 2003, and, even with the increase, HES is still the least expensive provider in Hermiston and one of the cheapest in the state.

Mayor Dave Drotzmann said the city seriously considers all rate increases and that this increase was necessary to continue providing “reliable, low-cost service to members.”

In other council news:

- Council members unanimously approved a resolution to submit an application to renew the city’s enterprise zone, which offers temporary property tax abatement to new industrial developments. According to a staff report from City Manager Byron Smith, since 2004, DuPont-Pioneer Seed and Shearer’s Foods utilized the zone for \$83 million in expansions,

which created 278 full-time jobs with an annual payroll of \$7.9 million in 2014. He said the tax exemption will expire for one of the expansions in July, which will bring in approximately \$180,000 in new general fund tax revenue for the city alone, while also benefiting other local tax districts. Drotzmann said the zone has been “a very good tool for the city” to entice new business investment.

- Council members unanimously approved a motion to change the rules to improve the flow of City Council meetings. Smith said several items on the agenda will be consolidated, and the opportunity for public input will be expanded. He said people will still have the opportunity to address the council about items not included on the agenda during an initial period, and public comments about agenda items will now be allowed during specified periods when the council is considering each issue before a vote occurs. Smith said the procedure would “be a little different” but might allow for smoother discussion. Councilman Doug Smith said he believed the new format would be more “user friendly” for the public.

- After an executive session for a city manager performance review, Drotzmann said Smith performed well during his first six months on the job.

“It’s been nice to have you on board,” he said.

BABYSITTING BASICS 101
For babysitters ages 10-15. Learn childcare techniques, children's developmental ages and what to expect, basic first aid and infant and child CPR.
Next class:
Saturday, March 14
9:00am-3:00pm
GSMC Conference Room
\$30, includes lunch & all class materials
Must pre-register & pre-pay

HEALTHY SATURDAYS
An excellent opportunity to improve your health! Free health information, screenings, and wellness coaching.
March 14 or April 11
10am-12pm
GSMC Wellness Center (behind hospital)

For information or to register for a class, call (541) 667-3509 or email healthinfo@gshealth.org
Working every day to promote a healthy community

Education and Wellness Services 667-3509

Get Unlimited Everything.

Plus \$50 back.

Switch to a Simple Connect Prepaid Plan for just \$45/mo. with Unlimited Data, Talk and Text, including 1GB of high-speed data. Plus, for a limited time, get a \$50 U.S. Cellular® Promotional Card to use toward the latest accessories or your next month of service.

Samsung GALAXY S5

Things we want you to know: Add. fees, taxes and terms apply and vary by svc. and eqmt. Use of svc. constitutes acceptance of agmt. terms. In order to receive plan minutes, the monthly charge must be paid before due date. You may be charged at any time of day on your due date and should refill before that date to avoid svc. interruption. Roaming, directory assistance and international calls require additional account funds to complete calls. **Data speeds:** Full applicable data speeds apply for the first 1GB of usage. Data speeds shall be slowed to 1x thereafter for the remainder of the billing cycle. **\$50 U.S. Cellular® Promotional Card:** New line activation on Simple Connect Prepaid Plan is required. Issued by MetaBank.™ Member FDIC; additional offers are not sponsored or endorsed by MetaBank. Valid only for purchases at U.S. Cellular stores and uscellular.com. Offers valid at participating locations only and cannot be combined. See store or uscellular.com for details. Limited-time offer. Trademarks and trade names are the property of their respective owners. ©2015 U.S. Cellular