

# Hermiston teen on the road to recovery

By TAMMY MALGESINI FOR THE HERMISTON HERALD

Zeddrik Cota is riding high a little more than two years after a debilitating bicycle accident that resulted in severe head injuries.

"Before the accident he was always struggling in school," said Oscar Cota, the 14-year-old's father. "He was presented with an award in recognition of his leadership in class."

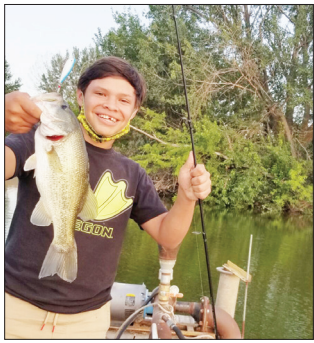
The proud papa went on to say his son is now carrying a 3.79 GPA. The award, he said, was awarded by Hermiston High School for his son's learning efforts, leadership skills and going above and beyond in the district's distance learning program. He was nominated for the award anonymously, which was presented Oct. 23 by School Resource Officer Derrick Williams.

"I feel happy and proud of myself knowing that I'm doing good. I'm doing better," Zeddrik said.

He calls distance learning "different," but believes it has been a contributing factor to doing better in school. His father agrees, saying he and Zeddrik's mother, Alaina Abbott, have discussed having their son continue with online school even after COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

After the June 14, 2018, bicycle accident, which occurred at the Hermiston Campus Life skate park, Zeddrik was transferred via medical helicopter to Legacy Emanuel Medical Center in Portland. A medically-induced coma and a long road to recovery followed. Oscar said his son's physician at Randall Children's Hospital at Legacy Emanuel, is pleased with his patient's progress.

Oscar said Zeddrik still requires extensive dental work. In addition, he said



Oscar Cota/Contributed Photo  
**Zeddrik Cota shows off a fish he caught recently.**

his son still experiences some issues with his memory and staying focused.

Zeddrik, who recalls little from the accident, said he remembers waking up in the hospital in Portland with his parents staring at him. One thing he appreciates is that his brother called for paramedics and the expertise of first responders.

In addition, Zeddrik is grateful for the outpouring of support from the community. He received numerous posters and boxes of cards wishing him well.

While the accident has restricted Zeddrik's activities to noncontact sports, he has been enjoying participating on the high school's trap shooting team. In addition, he likes spending time with his family and dogs, as well as fishing and hunting, including for ducks and shed. Several months after the accident, Zeddrik got the go-ahead by his doctor to go hunting. He was the only one in the family that had pulled an elk tag that year. He was successful, bagging a 6-point bull.

Also, Zeddrik has gotten back into the saddle — riding his bike. He stressed the importance of donning a helmet while riding a bike.

"I don't like to wear it, but I'm glad I did," he said. "I wish more kids would wear them."

# Awards link officers, students

By JADE MCDOWELL NEWS EDITOR

If a police officer comes knocking at a Hermiston School District student's door, it doesn't necessarily mean they're in trouble.

The district's three school resource officers have been visiting select students each Friday to hand out awards voted on by the students' teachers. The awards can be for good behavior, improved attendance or other categories where teachers feel a student deserves recognition. The award comes with a gift card and certificate.

Officer Betty Nava, who currently covers the district's two middle schools and has been a school resource officer since 2016, said delivering awards to students at home has been a nice way to reconnect with them after months of distance learning.

"I get to see a lot of kids that I got to know other years and haven't seen for a while," she said.

She said the kids "light up" when they find out they got an award, and parents often show excitement and pride as well.

In normal years, school resource officers spend time each day at the schools. While their presence provides a measure of security for the schools, the idea is also for officers to build credibility and positive relationships with students. That mission has been hard to fulfill this year when students are learning online.



Oscar Cota/Contributed Photo  
**Zeddrik Cota, left, receives one of Hermiston High School's awards from Officer Derrick Williams, right.**

Officer Derrick Williams was assigned to be a school resource officer for Hermiston High School in the spring, but since then SROs have mostly been on regular patrol duties since they can't spend time with students in schools. Williams said since the awards started up, it has been fun going out each Friday to hand out the 16 awards for the

week. "It's definitely a good way to utilize what time we do have with the kids when they're not in the schools," he said.

They usually call ahead to say they're coming, he said, but sometimes the parents don't tell the student and he gets to surprise them. Some students' first reaction to an officer showing up to their house is worry that they're in trouble for something.

Officer Juan Balli, who covers the elementary schools, also said students' first reaction to seeing a police officer at the door can be fear, but it turns into excitement when they realize they won an award.

"Elementary kids are bright-eyed: 'Oh I got one!'" he said.

Dan Greenough, principal at Desert View Elementary School, said his school does three awards per week, alternating between one kindergartener, first-grader and second-grader one week and a third-, fourth- and fifth-grader the next.

"Teachers work as a grade-level team and talk about the kids and who's really showing that grit and perseverance through comprehensive distance learning, and choose one student," he said.

He said teachers have had a hard time not being able to be face-to-face with their students, so they have enjoyed being able to select students for the awards.

"It's been fun," he said. "It's a great way to recognize the kids."

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# HOW WE RECOVER

**We can only defeat COVID-19 by working together, protecting our families' health, and looking out for our community.**

**We're on the right path, but we still have work to do.**

- 1 Reduce your risk of contracting coronavirus** by practicing good health habits. Wash your hands regularly, maintain 6 feet of physical distance from others, and keep indoor gatherings to 10 people or fewer.
- 2 Stop the spread of coronavirus** by staying home if you're sick and wearing a mask when in public. Local contact tracers will call to offer guidance and information if you or someone close to you tests positive for COVID-19. These professionals will also provide information for your safety and recovery.
- 3 Eradicate COVID-19 from Umatilla County** by staying vigilant to avoid a winter resurgence. This is how we will return students to the classroom and fully reopen businesses as soon as safely possible.

