

9-year-old's party does double duty

Boy's string of surgeries inspires mom to merge birthday bash, blood drive

BY L. LAMOR WILLIAMS
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

The Saturday afternoon birthday party combined fun and function.

First, the party celebrated the life of 9-year-old Hunter Wilson, who's been in and out of hospitals since he was born.

Secondly, and of equal importance because Hunter's had countless blood transfusions, the party/blood drive allowed his family to help others who struggle with disabilities and prepare for Hunter's next round

of surgery, when he will surely need another transfusion.

"It's kind of hard to ask somebody to give something you're not willing to give yourself," said Hunter's mother, Amy Wilson. "He's had blood transfusions a lot in his life, and we just decided to do blood drives or to raise money for Arkansas Children's Hospital or Ronald McDonald House for his birthdays to honor his life."

While Red Cross workers drew blood from some of about 40 family members and friends,

others dined on cupcakes, hot dogs and nachos and washed down the fare with slushies.

Carol Farmer, a Greater Red Cross of Arkansas donor recruitment representative, said families like the Wilsons are rare.

"When a mother steps up to the plate like Amy did and says 'We want to have a blood drive because my son's been sick and we want to help replenish the supply,' you just don't see that a lot. Not in Pulaski County," Farmer said.

Brittney Willis, 18, attends

Smith Chapel Baptist Church in Colt with the Wilson family, which also includes dad, Tim; brother Christopher, 4; and sister Madison, 2. She said she was happy to donate even though "it kinda hurt."

"I figured this was a way to contribute to him somehow," Willis said. "I figured if I can't help him, I can at least help someone else."

The Red Cross has said that on any given day, an average of 39,000 pints of red blood cells

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Blood

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are needed for patients in the United States. Farmer said the drive yielded 23 pints of blood, "a good turnout for a Saturday when it's 100 degrees outside," she said.

Farmer said the group always needs blood donations and anyone interested in donating can call (501) 614-4400 to find blood drives or schedule an appointment to donate at the nearest center.

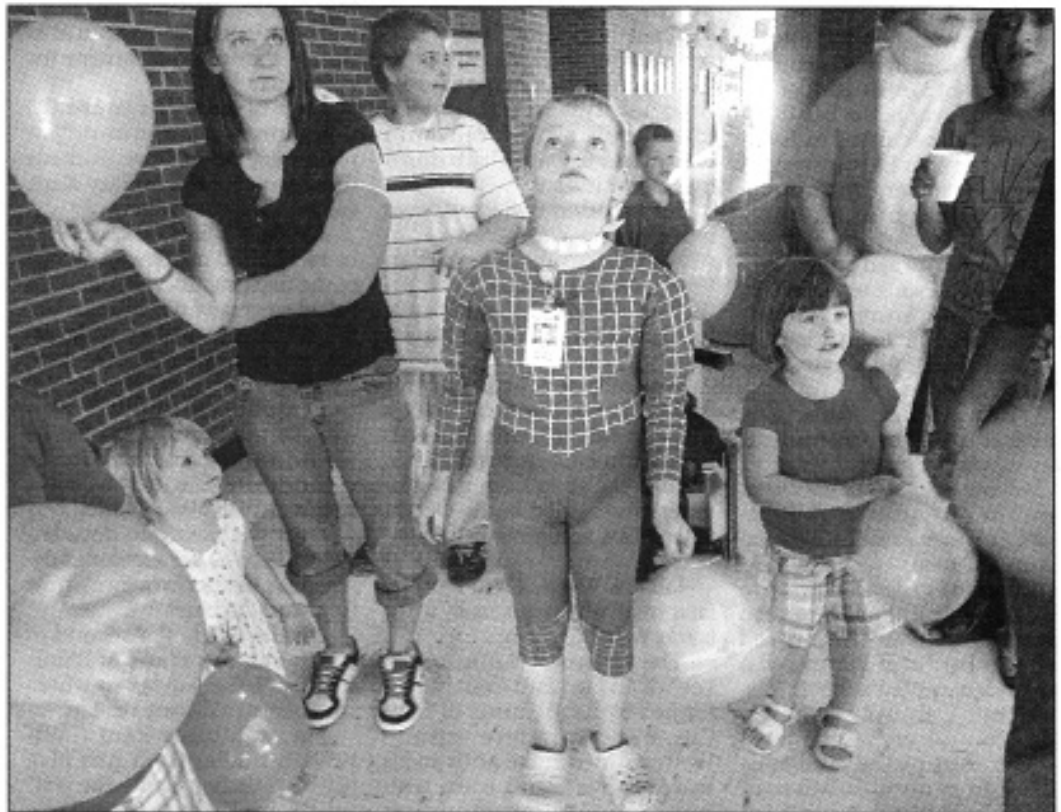
Saturday's hospital-themed party — many guests had fake wounds like black eyes, broken bones and even a fork sticking out of someone's leg — was held at the Arkansas School for the Deaf.

Hunter, decked out as his favorite superhero, Spider-Man, tooted around in his motorized wheelchair, beaming and care-free.

Hunter, who's deaf, has a congenital diaphragmatic hernia and was also born with a cleft lip, cleft palate, scoliosis and chronic lung disease.

None of that stops him from just being a boy, his mother notes.

"He does everything a regular kid does; we just have to make



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Hunter Wilson (center) plays balloon games with family members during a blood drive and birthday party Saturday at the Arkansas School for the Deaf. Hunter has a long history of medical problems.

a few modifications," Wilson said.

She said she hopes more fam-

ilies will celebrate with similar dual-purpose parties.

"This would be a great idea

for other people," Wilson said. "It's giving back and it's having fun at the same time."

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I edited this story on the rim and wrote the headline and deck.