What began as severe arm pain for a young Caldwell boy in 2019 turned out to be something much worse. Seven-year-old James Winkelman and his family are now fighting a difficult battle with leukemia, but they’re not doing it alone. Generous Red Cross blood donors provide the blood products James and others like him count on during the incredibly difficult treatment process.

“Thank you so much,” James’ mom Savannah said to the blood donors who are helping her son. “Because of you—on my son’s worst days—you made it better. You gave him energy. You gave him life to be a child during absolute hell. The donors are amazing, and these kids would die without them. That’s the honest-to-goodness truth because chemo wipes out their blood cells.”

Shortly before Christmas in 2019, James began experiencing arm pain. His family took him to urgent care, but X-rays didn’t reveal...
Nurses: ‘It feels so good’

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

California on our days off and just loved it," she said. “It’s an opportunity to travel, to use your skills to really help out and to serve people.”

From that point on they were hooked. “Once you get into it, Red Cross hangs on to you pretty tight,” she said. Ken and Judy continue to serve Red Cross back home in Missoula, helping families impacted by home fires and other disasters. Much of Judy’s work is done virtually as she helps families across Montana and Idaho.

“I simply talk to the person, they tell me what meds they’ve lost, I call the pharmacy and check the availability of refills, maybe call the doctor and make sure those meds are replaced,” she said. “It’s just heartwarming to feel like you’re helping someone. It also brings you back to the realization that ‘Oh my gosh, this could be me.’”

Before she retired, Judy worked in home health, troop care, and so forth and so on, to that, in cancer and pharmaceutical research in Billings. Her Red Cross volunteerism allows her to continue to fill her need to help others.

And while they’ve been staying closer to home lately, come December, Ken and Judy are planning to hit the road again in their RV and maybe help out more folks impacted by disaster along the way.

“Giving here and there feels so good, and you get so much back,” she said. “The clients are wonderful and so grateful.”

35 years’ experience flows into Red Cross

MUCH LIKE JUDY MILLER, the desire to continue helping others post retirement also drew Barbara Gumbert to the Red Cross.

After a 35-year career as an operating room nurse, it didn’t take long for Barbara to begin looking for an opportunity to put her compassion and her talents to good use once again.

“I still had so much to give, and I still cared so much about people that I needed to do something,” she said. That’s when she discovered the opportunity to volunteer as a Red Cross nurse.

Since signing on five years ago, Barbara, who lives in Kalispell, has helped during major national disasters and has helped out during emergencies in Montana. Her first deployment took her to Louisiana in 2016 during spring flooding.

“We had tornado warnings and thunderstorm warnings and flood warnings when I was there, but I enjoyed it immensely, taking care of the people who were in the shelter,” she said.

Three years later, while living in Ohio, she helped families in the Dayton area after several tornadoes ripped through the region.

One of the shelters Barbara was working in closed and was combined with another shelter. Barbara remembered working into the night at that location, where many of the clients she had been helping previously were now staying.

“I came in carrying my stuff and one of the clients said ‘Barbara!’ and then all they went ‘Yay,’ she’s here.’

“The feeling that gave you… I was almost in tears.”

Barbara said many of the clients she tended to during that deployment had severe health issues, including diabetes and heart problems.

She remembers one client who needed daily insulin shots but was unable to do it himself. “He would bring me his insulin and know how much he needed, and I would give him the shot, and he was just as delighted as could be.”

“How easy is that to give someone some happiness?”

Barbara encourages others to raise their hand, roll up their sleeves and give it a try.

“The clients are very warm and very grateful to you just for sitting and talk- ing with them,” she said. “They know they are being cared for, and they know that a person cares. They feel the love more when you’re there.”

“Do it for the feeling that you’re making a difference to someone,” she said. “Barbara encourages others to raise their hand, roll up their sleeves and give it a try.”

—By Matt Ochsner

Paid position open near Boise

A paid position is available in the Boise area, and volunteer blood drive ambassadors are needed, as well. Also, check out the virtual cookbook and the November Ketchup With Friends 2.0 for goofing off with colleagues.

ARMED FORCES PROGRAM

MISSION: VOLUNTEER. The Red Cross of Idaho and Montana is working to hire a Service to the Armed Forces and International Services program manager in the Treasure Valley area.

Are you an energetic, ambitious individual looking to support our military, veteran, and international communities? Are you an energetic, ambitious individual looking to support our military, veteran, and international communities? Are you an energetic, ambitious individual looking to support our military, veteran, and international communities? Are you an energetic, ambitious individual looking to support our military, veteran, and international communities? Are you an energetic, ambitious individual looking to support our military, veteran, and international communities? Are you an energetic, ambitious individual looking to support our military, veteran, and international communities? Are you an energetic, ambitious individual looking to support our military, veteran, and international communities? Are you an energetic, ambitious individual looking to support our military, veteran, and international communities?

Responsibilities include team building, working with project manage- ment and other volunteer teams, and working with diverse people.

If this sounds like something up your alley, click on this link for more!

VOLUNTEER AS A RED CROSS NURSE

Montana Red Cross is seeking health professionals to assist with people’s health needs in the state. Both associate and supervisory level opportunities are available.

If you’re interested, or to learn more, please send an email to IDMT.Volunteer@redcross.org or call 406-493-8778.

Barbara Gumbert

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Client cards: Attention snowbirds, those who wander!

Our next quarterly inventory of client assistance is coming up on Dec. 1. Catherholders will have access to the online reporting form at that time.

In the meantime, we need your help to make this a success! If you will not be able to access your cards on Dec. 1 (or within the six following days) because of travel, please use one of the following options in advance. However, be sure to keep the information current if you activate a card in the days just prior to Dec. 1.

■ Take a photo of your card envelopes or make a note of your card info in your phone so you can report from anywhere with a cell or wifi signal. You will need the batch, envelope, and proxy numbers for each card.

■ Contact Angela by e-mail (angela.james@redcross.org) and give her your card info before you travel.

■ Provide your card info in advance to your DAT lead or DPS who can report on your behalf on Dec. 1. Angela is accountable for more than 1,000 cards, so this is a huge task. As a region we are bound to these dates for national compliance.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

He faced infections, fevers, nausea, and frustrating physical therapy sessions, and had a feeding tube for 10 months. He also received much-needed blood products that kept his tired body going while the aggressive chemo treatments continued. In the early going, that blood was hard to come by, however—a result of COVID-19 and challenges of collecting blood. That meant no trans- fusions unless James’ symptoms were severe.

“Cancer treatment is bad enough and to have a blood shortage on top of it was horrible,” Savannah said. “At that time, we were asking everyone to please donate.”

But eventually that shortage began to ease, and James received several plate- let transfusions a week for two weeks and whole blood as well.

And finally, James began to turn the corner. A year and a half after his difficult diagnosis, James is a silly, video-game-loving 7-year-old. He enjoys playing pranks on his dad, Josh, and his little brother, Noah, and hanging out with his dog, Finn.

“James is a little sweetheart,” Savannah said. “He’s so cuddly and so lov- ing, and if someone is sad, he’s just like ‘Here’s your daily hug. It’s OK.’”

His hair has grown back, he’s off his feeding tube, but his daily chemo regi- men continues, as it will for the next two years. He’s still battling infections and severe pain in his back and legs, but there’s finally some light at the end of what has been a long dark tunnel.

“Right now, he’s doing really well,” Savannah said. “He’s working on get- ting his energy back and just being a kid again.”

And blood donors played a key part. They are keeping our kids alive and allowing them to get these treatments to save their lives,” Savannah said.

“For those who are thinking about donating, I would just tell them this is massively impactful. And as a mom of a child with cancer, I am incredibly grateful when blood is available for my son so he doesn’t have to suffer longer than necessary.”

Turning the corner