

Wildcat first-responder raising funds for 5K

By Jeff Weston, Ukiah Daily Journal

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A great deal of community sports writing, photography and coverage focus on statistics, scores, games and the like. In case you hadn't already noticed.

To a great many in this small community, local sports is life. It brings together the young and the old into well-oiled machines of athleticism and expertise to compete on the field of battle against a variety of opponents. Whether it's on the court, behind the pitcher's mound or in the stands, Ukiah has a rich history as a sports-loving community.

But what about those who aren't running across the field to score a touchdown or directing the plays? If you've ever been to a Wildcat

home game of any kind, you'll notice there are more people standing on the sidelines than just the players, coaches, parents and grey-haired sports reporters snapping photos and taking notes. And thankfully so.

Among the regularly unsung collective of bodies along the side of the football fields are the team's first responders. These are the young men and women rushing out onto the field when a player falls to the ground and the crowd is left gasping. Each one has many a story to tell, but this story is about a special young man among the outstanding. His name is Clayton Ronk.

Clayton is a Junior at Ukiah High School. He discovered a passion for the Fire and Medical field in his Freshmen year through Ben O'Neill's scrubs/extreme responders class at UHS. He spends many hours volunteering as the student medical standby at home games at Ukiah High and is interested in pursuing a career in the health services after high school, with an expressed interest as a paramedic and flight nurse. He also wants to take an EMT course during his senior year next year.

On Sept. 14, 2007, Clayton was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. 1. He was 7 years old and a 3rd grader at Redwood Valley Elementary. The day before, on Sept. 13, Clayton was sent to the office by his teacher who said he, "didn't appear well". 1. The next day he was ultimately life flighted by REACH from UVMC to UCSF children's hospital where he spent several days in the ICU and a hospital room.

"Every Diabetic is different," said Clayton's mother, Karin Ronk. "I don't know that it's more or less severe in any one person to the next. Personally I think it's all about how aware you are of your disease, and how conscious you are of caring for yourself. But then again I think there is no rhyme or reason to Diabetes and you can do and eat the same thing from one day to the next but have completely different outcomes".

Karin Ronk added, "I always say the wind can change directions and his blood sugar is off either too high or too low. Everything affects it; food, exercise, sleep, stress, environmental (weather), change in daily routine, anything".

On top of all this, as Clayton entered his pre-teen years, he also developed hypoglycemic unawareness - the inability to feel the change or drop in his blood sugar. Often times this would place him in an emergency low

blood sugar situation before he would ever feel it. A low blood sugar, if not treated, could lead to seizures, coma, brain injury or even death.

Enter here, the life-saver's life-saver, Whitley. Both an amazing dog and companion, Whitley helps Clayton every day. Clay was placed with Whitley on April 3, 2014. She is trained to smell the change/drop in blood sugar and often detects it 20-30 minutes before a machine can. Whitley has given Clayton's family a sense of peace and security that she is watching over him.

"It's hard to describe their relationship," said Karin Ronk. "Their bond is so incredible. The depth of love they have for each other is just amazing. They are each other's other half and when Whitley is away from Clay you can see and feel her anxiety. Sometimes Clay will leave her for a few hours to attend a school event that she can't go with (maybe due to noise or logistics) and Whitley will stand by the door looking outside waiting for him to return. But basically any where Clay goes, she goes".

Whitley is giving Clayton the ability to go out and do all the 'normal' things other teens without Diabetes do, without his parents needing to be there to watch over him.

In gratitude to Whitley, Clayton is fundraising for the Dogs4diabetics organization that placed the two of them together. Dogs4diabetics is a nonprofit organization located in Concord that places these lifesaving dogs with clients at no cost to the family.

Ronk added, "This is huge and I'm not aware of any other organization out there that does this for no cost".

The event is the organization's annual fundraiser and it's called the Dogs4Diabetics's Lantern 5k walk/run. It is being held on Saturday, June 10, in Walnut Creek. Clayton is Captain of his team this year and their team name is Miracle Dogs.

On Tuesday, May 2, from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., Slam Dunk Pizza will be holding a day-long fundraiser for Clayton and Whitley's Dogs4Diabetics's annual 5k walk/run. Raffle tickets will be sold at this location and Slam Dunk Pizza will be donating 20 percent of every sale to the fundraiser when you bring in a flyer for the walk event. Raffle prizes will include a weekend in Tahoe, an indoor/outdoor grill, or a family of four pizza dinner and tickets are \$5 each.

Clayton's goal is to raise \$2,000 for the 5k walk/run with the raffle and event, but you can also donate to the fundraiser online at d4ddogwalk.dojiggy.com/claytonronk.

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