



This year marks the third year in a row that Zachary has participated in the telethon which is held each year in Casper. This year the Casper telethon raised \$168,002

Zachary Phillips, 10, speaks with one of the hosts at the Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Association Telethon which aired Memorial Day weekend. The telethon raises money for muscular dystrophy research and raises awareness in the community.

# Undaunted

## Heroes come in small packages

**Airman 1st Class Connor Elayan**  
*Public Affairs*

Zachary Phillips sits quietly with his hands folded in his lap but his big, blue eyes give away his energetic spirit, which becomes even more apparent as he begins to play with his 5-year-old brother, Sean. Like most young boys, he enjoys the finer things in life like collecting rocks and bugs.

"He's a normal 10-year-old," said his mother, Kim Phillips.

Looking at Zachary, you would never know that he is living with a neuromuscular disease.

When Zachary was two years old, his parents started to notice that something was not right. "At two, he didn't jump, and he couldn't walk up stairs without help," said Mrs. Phillips.

After performing many tests on young Zachary, doctors diagnosed him with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy.

According to the Muscular Dystrophy Association's website, Duchenne muscular dystrophy is a genetic, degenerative disease caused by an absence of the protein dystrophin, which keeps muscles intact.

The disease, which usually affects only boys, can cause muscle weakness as early as three years old. Skeletal and voluntary muscles in the arms, leg and trunk gradually weaken over time and by the teenage years, the boy's heart and respiratory muscles may also be affected.

Although the diagnosis was devastating for both Kim and

Zachary's father, Master Sgt. Byron Phillips, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the mechanical shop at the 90th Maintenance Operation Squadron, they felt they needed to do something to make a difference.

This year marks the third year in a row that the Zachary and his family have taken on the role as the Muscular Dystrophy Association's Southern Wyoming Ambassador family.

"We just kind of fell into it," said Sergeant Phillips. "First, we were invited to the [Jerry Lewis MDA] telethon to see how it worked and to see what it was all about."

After meeting Zachary, the Phillips' were asked to be the ambassador family.

As the ambassador family, the Phillips' are needed to have a presence in the community, said Micki Carwin, MDA regional Healthcare Services Coordinator.

"It's a great opportunity because both the child and the family get to be involved with what the MDA is trying to accomplish," she said.

Zachary is kept busy participating in many community activities including Make-A-Wish's Shamrocks Against Dystrophy in March and MDA lock-ups which "raise bail" to help patients with neuromuscular diseases, said Melissa Ortberg, MDA Wyoming District Director.

This past Labor Day weekend, Zachary was busy with both the Jerry Lewis MDA telethon in Casper and the "Fill the Boot" campaign.

As part of his duties for "Fill

the Boot," Zachary goes out into the community and meets local firefighters who help fill the boot to raise money to benefit people with muscular dystrophy.

"He doesn't fully understand what he is doing still," said Master Sgt. Phillips. "He likes it because he gets to see the firehouses. That's his favorite part."

Through "Fill the Boot" Zachary has gotten to know the firefighters well.

"The city firefighters pick him up from school in the fire truck for all his birthdays," said Mrs. Phillips. "All the firefighters in town are wonderful to him."

Although Zachary enjoys his ambassador duties, being the ambassador family isn't all fun and games.

"It's a large responsibility for any family, especially when you consider the special needs of a child with MD," said Ms. Carwin.

Being the ambassador family requires a lot of dedication and responsibility, and also a lot of travel.

"It's a huge undertaking and we really appreciate what the families are doing," she added.

Last year Zachary had two wishes. His first wish came true when he got to meet the United States Air Force Thunderbirds. The second wish came true when Make-A-Wish sent him and his family on a seven-day vacation to Disney World over the Easter holiday.

This year Zachary hopes to see the ocean and his family is hoping to raise the awareness of MD at Warren.

If you have any question or would like to know what you can do to help, call Melissa Ortberg at MDA at 472-0755.



Photos by Master Sgt. Byron Phillips

Zachary gets ready to go out onto Coors Field to impress the Colorado Rockies' fans with his "dizzybat" skills as part of the Colorado Rockies' MD night.