

# Montana Hope Project



Sponsored by the Association of  
Montana Highway Patrolmen

May 2001

Volume 4, Issue 1



To Amber — Thank you for the  
art! God bless you  
Russ

*Official White House Photo*

President George W. Bush accepts an original painting from Montana Hope Project recipient Amber Olson and her father, Russ of Belt. See complete story on pages 9, 10 and 11 of this publication.

# From the President's desk.....



**Brooke Darfler and Kelly Mantooth**

Isn't it great living in Montana in the springtime? By the time this newsletter comes out, the spring flowers should be in full bloom with some leaves growing back on the trees. No more cold weather...well at least not bitter cold. It is nice to say, "Winter has come and gone."

Did you happen to see the Hope Project logos in the Town Pump stores? How about the Thriftway/Sutey Oil stores? Did you buy one? What a great shot in the arm for our late winter fundraising dol-drums.

Thanks to Alice O'Donnell for contacting Brian Bossard of Thriftway/Sutey Oil and Maureen Kenneally of Town Pump! Most of our fundraising is done in the summer months and slows down during the winter. With help from folks like these, raising funds for wish-granting doesn't stop when the snow flies.

Speaking of wishes, by the time you receive this newsletter we will have granted at least eight wishes this year. Several are pending with travel dates set.

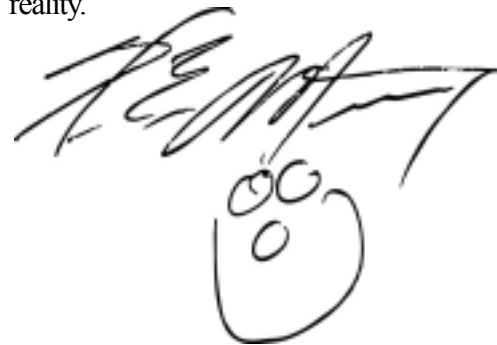
That brings us to 164 wishes granted since 1984!

The Hope Project doesn't stop at just granting a single wish. Each year we have a reunion at the Izaak Walton Inn, Essex, MT. This year marks the 16<sup>th</sup> annual reunion. This weekend is provided at no cost to past recipients and/or their immediate families. It is a weekend of fun in Glacier Park, helicopter rides over Glacier (thank you Minuteman Aviation!), clowns, food, truck rides, motorcycle rides, horse and carriage rides, music and lots of plain old FUN! What will be new this year is the sky bridge over the railroad from the inn to the "caboose rooms." Not only can you safely stand above a rumbling train as it goes by, but you can see above the trees into Glacier Park. We are still planning some other fun stuff for the weekend but I would be neglectful if I did not thank the many, many volunteers that donate their time and services each year to make this weekend a huge success. Thank you all!

The Montana Hope Project established an endowment fund through the Montana Community Foundation. This fund is an irrevocable fund that qualifies donors for the Montana Tax credit. The Hope Project cannot touch the principle balance of this fund but can use the interest gained from this fund for wish granting. Not only does the Hope Project receive a donation from you but also you receive a very nice tax credit. If you, your company, or anyone you know is interested in donating to the

Montana Hope Project Endowment Fund contact us at 406-538-4673 or e-mail [mthope@lewistown.net](mailto:mthope@lewistown.net).

As you can see from other articles in this newsletter there are many numerous, fun, events scheduled for this summer. I look forward to meeting many of you and to be able to personally say thank you for your donations and your time. On behalf of the kids and families that have been granted wishes, THANK YOU! With your help, the Montana Hope Project will continue making dreams become a child's reality.



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## Our new website is awesome!



**Check it out at:**

[www.montanahope.org](http://www.montanahope.org)

Special thanks to John Forbes of Applied Information Engineering Solutions, Inc. (AIES, Inc.) for all his work and patience!



# In Memoriam

March 3 of this year, the Montana Hope Project lost a dear friend, Frank Risley of Missoula. Frank was enroute on a three-week trip to Mexico when he lost his life in a single-vehicle accident outside of El Centro, Calif. He was riding his Valkyrie and died doing what he enjoyed most.

Frank was a strong supporter of the Hope Project and was always bent over backwards to help. He looked forward to and enjoyed giving the children rides at the annual reunion in Essex. In recognition of his efforts, the 2001 Ride for Hope 500 is dedicated to Frank's memory.

The obituary that appeared in the Missoulian follows:

MISSOULA - Frank L. Risley, 69, first-born son of Frank and Elizabeth Risley, passed away Saturday, March 3, 2001. He was born in Detroit on Dec. 2, 1931.

Frank joined the U.S. Coast Guard at the age of 17, serving for 21 years, with 11 of those years overseas. In 1969, he retired as a chief warrant officer.

Frank's motorcycle travels brought him to Montana. He fell in love with our Big Sky state and decided to move his family from Charlevoix, Mich., to Missoula in 1975. Frank was involved in many motorcycle club activities and was highly dedi-



**Frank Risley, December 2, 1931 - March 3, 2001**  
Former Montana Hope Project President Mitch Tuttle, far left, presents Frank Risely and his wife Carole an etched pitcher commemorating their efforts for the Project at the 2000 Ride For Hope 500 in Polson. Project Vice-president Perry Brown, far right, is also pictured. Frank will always be riding beside us and watching over us.

cated to the Montana Hope Project, helping Montana's terminally ill children.

Survivors include his wife Carole; his daughter Mary Greil of Missoula and her husband Tom and their children Ben and Katy; his daughter Karen Servick of New Castle, Pa., and her husband Joe and their daughter Montana; his stepson Matt Hermes of Missoula and his wife Peggy and their daughter Reilly; his stepson Jeff Hermes of Greenacres, Wash., and his

wife Kim and their son Jacob; brothers Chuck, Bob and Dave Risley and their wives; and many nieces, nephews and cousins.

A celebration of Frank's life, with family and friends was held March 16, in Missoula at the National Guard Armory.

In lieu of flowers memorials were made to Montana Hope Project.

## Give the gift of HOPE

*Help make a wish come true for a critically ill Montana child. Make a donation to the Montana Hope Project in the name of a family member, friend or recipient.*

*A donation to the Montana Hope Project directly benefits Montana children.*

**HOPE - always the perfect gift**

This gift is made in: honor of \_\_\_\_\_  
memory

It is being given by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Your Name

Send confirmation card to: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Complete and send to: The Montana Hope Project, P.O. Box 5927, Helena, MT 59604**

# Dear Hope Project...

Story and photos by Cindy Stipcich  
Helena

My husband, Darrell, was out on fire duty during the 2000 fire season as a member of the Montana Army National Guard. The kids and I drove out to see him one weekend as he was working on the Toston-Maudlow fire. It was there that Montana Highway Patrolman Bruce Cocoli, Choteau, met James.

Bruce was on the same fire team as my husband.

After we left, Bruce asked Darrell if we had ever thought about James making a wish through the Montana Hope Project. When Darrell came home he discussed this with me.

Bruce ran into Darrell a month later at Guard Drill and asked him if we had given any more thought about James' wish. That is when Darrell gave Bruce the information about James and he called Montana Highway Patrolman Sgt. Mike Tooley.

*Bruce, thank you so much for being so compassionate and wanting James to make a wish.*

Mike came over to meet James and brought us an application. We filled out the application with James and decided not to tell the other (seven) children what we were doing.

*Mike, thank you so much for explaining the application process to us.*

We received a call the day after Christmas to find out James, Darrell, our seven other children and I were going to Disney World! You can only imagine how excited we were. Excited, yet a bit nervous, knowing we were going to have our hands full with all the kids. Initially, we were going to try and go in February but that was too soon to get everything all set. Thank heaven, there would have been no way we would have been ready to go in February.

Our next plan was to go in April, over



**James Skonberg, 14, is shown with Montana Highway Patrolman Tom Olds (left) and Sgt. Mike Tooley. James was the 160th child to receive a wish since the program began in 1984.**

Easter, so the kids wouldn't have to miss much school. Hope Project Wish Travel Coordinator Linda Douglass, was doing all of the correspondence and as it turned out we were able to go in April.

*Linda, thank you so much for explaining everything so thoroughly to us.*

April 11, 2001, we had all the kids and all their bags spread out all over the living room floor. Darrell and I were thinking, "What are we in for?"

You can only imagine eight children from 19 months to 15 years old – one a disabled son with Cerebral Palsy! And don't forget Grandma Jeannie who purchased her own ticket and went along to help with James.

Are we crazy? Maybe just a little!

Florida was something else. When we arrived it was a whopping 94 degrees and very humid. (It was cold and snowy in Helena.) It was hot, but it was nice.

The Give The Kids The World (GKTW) Village was so wonderful. The volunteers were so nice and helpful about

*(Please see Dear Hope Project page 5)*



**James at his home in Helena the morning he and his entire family left for Disney World. More than 40 companies donate money, materials and services to Give Kids The World ([www.gktw.org](http://www.gktw.org)) where all Hope Project families stay.**

**Dear Hope Project** .....from page 4  
everything. This was an experience we will never forget.

James wore his GKTW button everywhere he went and would receive the most wonderful, caring treatment you could imagine. The workers everywhere we visited were so warm and helpful to James. All of the characters would give James just that little bit of extra attention. The special treatment that James and the

rest of the family received is just inexplicable!

I guess I had never thought of James making a wish because up until three years ago, he was a healthy child. He came down with pneumonia in January of 1998 and has had chronic, reoccurring pneumonia ever since. In May of 2000 we were told to feed him through his g-tube because he was aspirating his food and drink, causing it to go into his lungs, which

caused the pneumonia. He has been doing better this past year. We just take things day-by-day.

We openheartedly would like to thank everyone for all that you have done for us and will continue to do for other families. This is a program that we hope will be able to continue for many years to come.

Thank you,  
James Skonberg  
Cindy and Darrell Stipcich and family



James Skonberg is shown with Montana Highway Patrolman Tom Olds (left) his father, Darrell Stipcich, sister Kaitie Stipcich (9), mother Cindy Stipcich, brothers Jesse Skonberg (13), Kyle Skonberg (10), Kyle Stipcich (13), Cody Stipcich (3); sisters Heather Stipcich (11) and Victoria Stipcich (1 1/2) and Sgt. Mike Tooley. Unlike other wish-granting organizations, the Montana Hope Project involves the entire family in the wish whenever possible. Additionally, the Hope Project invites every recipient and their entire families to attend an annual reunion in Glacier Park, all at no cost. The average cost of a wish is \$5,000.



Splish splash with the Skonberg/Stipcich family at Splash Mountain.

## Wondering what to do with your old license plates?



Turn those old plates into your County Treasurer's office when you pick up your new plates or take all those old plates gathering dust in your garage to your local Montana Highway Patrol office.

The license plates are recycled and the Montana Hope Project receives a monetary donation.

# Sutey Oil/Thriftway Stores selling logos for Hope

Sutey Oil/Thriftway stores have joined the Montana Hope Project fund-raising team.

Last year 11 Thriftway stores began selling logos and the event was such a success that they have added two stores to the list and will make it a semi-annual event. This year logos were sold during April and will appear in stores again in November.

Montana Hope Project President Kelly Mantooth welcomes Sutey Oil/Thriftway Stores to the family of Hope.

The event was organized by Alice O'Donnell of Anaconda and Sutey Oil/Thriftway stores Comptroller Brian Bossard.

If you have a fund-raising idea or would like to volunteer at an event, we'd like to hear from you. Please contact Kelly Mantooth, Montana Hope Project President, at (406) 538-4673, (406) 949-HOPE or e-mail him at [mthope@lewistown.net](mailto:mthope@lewistown.net).



Photo by Leanne Smith

Montana Hope Project President Kelly Mantooth accepts a check on behalf of Sutey Oil/Thriftway stores for \$1,500 from Alice O'Donnell, Anaconda, as Montana Highway Patrolman Myron Dingley, Stanford, looks on.

## Mark your calendars for our upcoming events

### Essex Reunion

**June 8, 9, 10, 2001**

Every Hope Project recipient and their family members are invited to the annual reunion. This special event is provided each year at no cost to the families.

**Contact:** Kelly Mantooth at (406) 538-4673; (406) 949-HOPE or e-mail him at [mthope@lewistown.net](mailto:mthope@lewistown.net)

### Helena Millennium Car Show

**June 23, 2001**

The Helena area car clubs are holding their first annual Millennium Car Show with proceeds to benefit the Montana Hope Project. This year's event will be held in downtown Helena during the Mount Helena Music Festival. The \$10 registration fee will be donated to the Montana Hope Project.

All car show participants are encouraged to gather pledges toward the Montana Hope Project. The Mount Helena Music Festival will donate two admission buttons to the festival and the registration will be waived for all participants that collect and turn in more than \$50 in pledges the day of the event. Registration is from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. The car show will be held on Fuller Avenue in Historic down-

town Helena from 1 to 4:30 p.m. Brochures and pledge forms are also available on our website at [www.montanahope.org](http://www.montanahope.org).

**Contact:** Duane Preshinger, Helena, (406) 443-7069 or e-mail him at [preshingerfam@msn.com](mailto:preshingerfam@msn.com)

### Ride For Hope Motorcycle Tour July 28, 2001

The twelfth Annual Ride For Hope 500 will be held July 28. This year's route takes us to Chico Hot Springs. Ride routes have been set. They are located in the brochure which is available at local motorcycle shops as well as on our website at [www.montanahope.org](http://www.montanahope.org).

Check-in is from 5 - 7 a.m. the day of the event.

Pre-register by July 1 and become eligible to win a get-a-way for two, compliments of Main Connection Services of Choteau.

Incentive prize criteria are listed in the brochure. Each \$100 in pledges earns 1 point. Apply those points to prizes and choose from a wide variety of cloth and leather items.

Each \$100 in pledges also earns a ticket that will be entered into the grand prize two, including airfare. The winning ticket

will be drawn at the End of Tour event. You must be present to win.

The phone number for Chico is 406-333-4933 and e-mail address is [chico@chicohotsprings.com](mailto:chico@chicohotsprings.com).

**Contact:** Cal Janes, Townsend (406) 266-3330 or e-mail him at [bacon244@hotmail.com](mailto:bacon244@hotmail.com)

### Helena Golf Tournament, Fox Ridge August 17, 2001

The Montana Hope Project Charity Scramble golf tournament is slated for Fox Ridge Golf Course.

Power Chevrolet will again sponsor the hole-in-one prize. Last year Doug Olson of Helena won a 2001 fully loaded Chevrolet Cavalier on his first drive of the day—a 141 yard drive off of hole number 14. In addition to the car, there will be many more opportunities for teams and individuals to win a wide variety of great prizes. Teams are being formed now.

**Contact:** Jeff Douglass, Helena at (406) 443-8581 or e-mail him at [tukethedog@juno.com](mailto:tukethedog@juno.com).

# Town Pump logo sales bear fruit

*From The 'Round Town Review*

Town Pump and Gaming Industry Friends to Society (GIFTS) have each donated \$1,000 to the Montana Hope Project, Dream Come True Program.

Montanans also contributed \$3,670 by purchasing Hope Project bear logos at Town Pump locations. Maureen Kenneally of the Town Pump Charitable Foundation said Town Pump employees helped make the logo fund-raiser a success. Top sales honors went to a Town Pump in Butte managed by Sharon Sanders. Sharon is the daughter of retired patrolman Tom Hamaker. Sharon offered incentive prizes to her employee that sold the most logos and the top salesman was Travis Greene. Sharon also awarded Travis with the incentive prize of a trip to Fairmont Hot Springs, donated by the Montana Hope Project and Fairmont.

Montana Hope Project President Kelly Mantooth thanked Town Pump for sponsoring this fund-raiser and said they plan to make it an annual event.



*Photo by Carrie Mantooth*

Town Pump raised \$3,670 for the Montana Hope Project by selling Montana Hope Project Bear logos in their stores for \$1 each. Presenting the check are (from left to right) Maureen Kenneally of the Town Pump Charitable Foundation; Alice O'Donnell, Hope Project board member; Kelly Mantooth, project president; Montana Highway Patrolman Joe Wyant of Anaconda and Sharon Sanders, manager of the top-selling Town Pump in Butte.



## Albertsons Community Partnership program growing

The Albertsons Community Partners Program continues to raise funds for the Montana Hope Project. Since the organization became a member of the program in 2000, more than \$1000 has been donated to the Hope Project.

Albertsons donates three percent of each cardholder's sales to the project when shoppers present their card at the checkout register.

Call Perry Brown at (406) 227-9287 or email him at [mtride@centric.net](mailto:mtride@centric.net) to request your free card today.

## Hope Project gets royal treatment

The Montana Hope Project has been receiving the "royal treatment" from Kleen King since 1999.

To date, Kleen King has donated more than \$2,380 to the project.

"The Montana Hope Project is a really good cause," said Lori Brisbee, Kleen King Administrative Assistant. "It gives something back to the community-it's something for our kids in Montana."

Every September through April, Kleen King donates a percentage of each whole system duct cleaning to the project. According to Brisbee, it works out to \$25 to \$45 per job.

"It's good to be part of giving something

positive to kids and their families who are going through turmoil. It's our way of giving something back to the community," Brisbee said.

Brisbee said that both the Helena and Bozeman area locations are involved in the donation. Kleen King advertises

the promotion on TV, radio and in newspapers.

The Montana Hope Project encourages our supporters to patronize the businesses listed in these pages and thank them for their efforts to raise money so that Montana's critically and chronically ill children can realize their dreams for many years to come.





*Photo by Patrolman Michael Downs  
Britney Sturgis, 11, of Sidney received a voice activated lap top computer from the Montana Hope Project in February. She is seen here with Montana Highway Patrolman Steve Downs. Britney was just returning home from school when the officers arrived. It was her first week of school since August. The computer and software that accompanied it was a bit overwhelming to the 14-year-old. Her immediate goal is to be able to return to her class swim team which she loves so much. Her long-term goal is to become a pediatric nurse. Patrolmen Michael and Steve Downs also presented Britney and her sister with Hope Project bears. Each bear wears a t-shirt with a Montana Highway Patrol shoulder patch sewn onto the front.*

## Dear Montana Hope Project...

Forgive us for the form letter routine, but a thank you is long overdue and this is the only way I know it will get done.

Thank you for your prayers, well wishes, your gifts, your positive energy, your time, your calls of concern, your generosity and all your support during the past three years.

Matt is done with chemotherapy and well on his way to a full recovery. We owe that in part to all of you and your constant support. Matthew believed he could get well and he did.

It is amazing to us still how Matt's disease has touched us. We have been blessed by being witness to the loving and caring side of life. You have showered us with your love and we are indebted to you all.

Thank you for the boxes of toys to a six-year-old who was told he would be hospitalized until his disease could be stabilized. Thank you Ronald McDonald House for the inexpensive facility to house our weary bodies at the end of the day and so grandparents could be close.

Thank you Missoula County Cancer Association for your volunteer hours turning donated monies into travel expense reimbursement for financially strapped families like ours.

Thank you for the calling card to keep us in touch with family. Thank you for the

money given with the intent that Tom and I could have an evening out and try to be normal for a night.

Thank you for your visits. Thank you for your homemade pictures and cards. Thank you for the balloons, stuffed animals and the video games.

Thank you for your willingness to accommodate a child with an issue such as this by getting him a tutor when his immune system made it impossible for him to attend school. Thank you for noticing there was something not quite right about my son's physical abilities that pointed us in the right direction to get an early diagnosis. Thank you for being a principal and teachers that cared.

Thank you for being his friend even when he was bald. Thank you for listening so well when he explained his illness and supporting him.

Thank you East Missoula Lions for the Christmas money to help our Christmas budget. Thank you for the anonymous donation of money when we needed it most.

Thank you for the flexibility with our jobs allowing Tom and I the freedom to be with our son when he needed us.

Thank you for your care in his treatments. Thank you for your tenderness and expertise. Thank you Leukemia society for reimbursement of medical and medicine expenses. Thank you for your ad-

vice in trying to get insurance issues resolved. But mostly thank you for listening with love.

Thank you for your hours on the track at the "Relay For Life" helping to raise money for a cure.

Thank you Montana Hope Project for the trip to Disney World and the annual reunion. We wouldn't have a vacation without it.

Thank you Camp Mak-A-Dream where both kids get special time and treated like kings.

Thank you for the opportunity to tell our story and help raise money and give some back.

Thank you for being sensitive to the fact that it was not only Matt who was affected by this disease and that each of us needed friends to lean on.

Thank you for saving pop tops for the Ronald McDonald House.

Thank you for giving blood. I have seen first-hand now who uses it and will be a lifetime donor.

I believe that we get back in this world what we give away. Based upon that belief, I have no doubt that you will all be blessed in a very big way.

Thank you for being a part of our lives. Thank you for all you do.

Laura, Tom, Nic and Matt Hungerford  
Missoula



# Dear Hope Project...

By Russ Olson, Belt

Life needs to be more than just an existence. Life needs to be lived. When a life is changed forever by a serious illness or an accident, a person's outlook on life can turn from brilliant shades of color to shades of gray or black.

Our daughter, Amber Olson, was the 64th recipient child of the Montana Hope Project and has been associated with it since 1993, when she was nine years old. She has a degenerative neurological disorder of an unknown origin and has been in a wheel chair since 1992. Over the years, she has lost the use of her legs, along with the use of her arms, hands and speech.

In spite of all that Amber has lost physically, her outlook on life remains joyous. It is a rare morning that Amber doesn't wake up to the world with the smile that has become her trademark. The reason for her positive attitude has a lot to do with the fact that so many people have done so much to see that her life has been more than just an existence. The Montana Hope Project has been there to smooth out the bumps in the road by sending Amber and our whole family to Disney World and by providing wonderful weekend reunions each year in Essex.

In the last year-and-a-half, Amber has realized a talent for art that is growing rapidly. Amber's art is not subdued. It is full of bright, beautiful colors. It is a window on her soul. It reflects her outlook on life. Amber's art reflects a life that is no mere existence, but a thing of beauty.

The Montana Hope Project and many other wonderful people have contributed to making Amber's life much more than it could have been.

If anyone should wonder if the Hope Project really makes a difference in the lives of the children it touches, one just needs to look at Amber's art to see that the answer is, "Yes". Please see pages 10 and 11 for more of Amber's artistic journey.



Five-year-old Nicole Renner of Billings holds her welcome sign at the Orlando airport. Nicole's wish was a trip to Disney World. She was the Hope Project's 161st recipient child.



## Project area coordinators

### Billings Area Coordinator

Shawn Hazelton, Billings  
(406) 254-9868  
spjahaze@home.com

### Kalispell Area Coordinator

Steve Lavin, Kalispell  
(406) 257-2939  
slaven@digisys.net

### Great Falls Area Coordinators

Henry and Jeanne Devereaux,  
Great Falls  
(406) 452-0440  
henrydevereaux@home.com

### Missoula Area Coordinators

Richard Hader, Missoula  
Tiana Weaver, Missoula  
(406) 721-7490  
RTTMA@cs.com

**Help bring HOPE to MT kids**  
If you know of a child who could benefit from a gift  
from the Montana Hope Project,  
contact one of the officers listed above.

# Amber Olson presents painting to President Bush

By Eric Newhouse  
Great Falls Tribune Staff Writer

Billings - March 26, 2001

Grinning broadly, Amber Dawn Olson of Belt waited in her wheelchair outside the Metra Park to meet George W. Bush and present the president with her painting.

“All day long, she had this great glowing grin,” said her father, Russ Olson, “and I’m ecstatic.”

Amber has a degenerative neurological disease of unknown origin — “That means they don’t know what’s wrong with her,” said her father — but she started painting a year and a half ago and she is becoming noticed.

The Belt High School junior was one of 32 young artists, and the only one from Montana, whose works were featured last week in an exhibition that opened up the Russell Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C., an opening she couldn’t attend.

“We couldn’t go to Washington last week, so it’s great the president came to meet her instead,” her dad said.

Amber also was honored last week in a ceremony in the Rotunda of the State Capitol in Helena, with none other than Gov. Judy Martz celebrating her accomplishments.

Amber communicates primarily with grins and with nods and shakes of her head, which makes her painting even more remarkable.

“It takes a great deal of concentration, but Amber really does her own painting,” her father said. “She selects the color, then aides load her palette and select her brushes. But she is able to use her own hands on the brush.”

As he spoke, Clay Schenk of Harlowton stood outside the Metra Park holding his cousin’s masterpiece — a brilliant green Montana landscape.

“Is Amber going to be able to give this to the president?” her father anxiously

“How Does Art Shape Your World?”



Amber Dawn Olson  
Belt, Montana

Series  
acrylic paint on panel (18" x 24")

Art has changed my world in the last two years. It makes me feel good about myself to be able to paint. My artwork helps me to show my feelings that I couldn't do before. It makes me feel wonderful.



**Above.** Amber recently won the attention of those who sponsor the VSA art show. Her painting was chosen to be reproduced on postcards and posters. (VSA arts is an international, nonprofit organization dedicated to providing educational and career opportunities through the arts for people with disabilities. More info on VSA is available at [www.vsarts.org](http://www.vsarts.org).) The painting is in the process of being acquired by the Salvatore Dali Museum in Florida. The Holter Museum of Art in Helena, Mont. also acquired one of her paintings.

*Photo by Wayne Arnst, Great Falls Tribune.* Amber sits surrounded by some of the art she has created. “Winter Snowstorm”, purchased by the Holter Museum, Helena, is at the top right.

asked a Secret Service agent.

“He’s expecting it,” the agent replied.

Amber grinned.

She owes her success to an art teacher, Leslie DeVoss, who noticed her potential and encouraged her to begin painting.

“She tried it and she liked it,” said her mother, Robin Olson.

Amber watched the Secret Service agents move a high school band through their security checkpoint, then motioned the Olsons toward a private meeting room behind the stage where she would greet President Bush and give him her Montana masterpiece.

As they wheeled her in, Amber grinned again, another wide, glowing grin.





*Photo by Wayne Arnst  
Great Falls Tribune*

Amber Olson, with Aide Jaime Archey acting as an easel, works on a new painting. Recently, her art work has gained much recognition. She was honored by Montana Governor Judy Martz in March and she was chosen to be a greeter for President George Bush during his trip to Billings March 27 of this year. Amber presented one of her paintings to the President. Amber became a recipient of a wish from the Montana Hope Project in 1993.

# A Study in color

## Finding her voice

*By Mary Ellen Hendrickson  
For the Great Falls Tribune*

Belt High School student Amber Olson, has discovered her artistic voice in her high school art class. One of her paintings, "Winter Snowstorm", was purchased for an award presentation to the Holter Museum in Helena.

Amber, who has been in a wheelchair since she was a third-grader, has difficulty speaking and moving because of a rare neurological disease.

Although Amber has taken art classes since second grade, her gradual loss of gross and fine motor control made it challenging to find art activities for her.

"My goal at the beginning of (last) year was that Amber would respect her own art work," said Leslie DeVos, Amber's art teacher.

Assisted by Amber's aide, Jaime

Archey, DeVos guided Amber through a series of paintings, progressing from a reliance on masked-off areas to control her painting to her current ability to control the direction, area and energy of each brush stroke.

Amber chooses her own subject matter and has a strong voice in the color of the pieces. Amber's aide helps dip her brush, then holds the canvas in front of her.

"Jaime is wonderful because she supports her and challenges her," DeVos said. "She's her friend and her mentor."

"This is a kid who hasn't been able to express emotion. It's like every painting captures her soul. Her first one is so powerful—very free. It has lots of energy," DeVos said.

DeVos recalls watching Amber paint one day during class. "She has such a look of concentration on her face. Then I looked around the room and every high school student was holding their brush poised, watching her."

Belt High School has grown along with Amber, superintendent Calvin Johnson said. Teachers modify course work, allowing Amber, accompanied by her aide, to participate in all regular classes except math.

"The one thing I can say is that we've been so blessed by so many people who have come into Amber's life," said Russ Olson, Amber's dad.

Amber's mother Robin Olson said, "Amber has always loved color. With painting, she is the art."

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## Events.....con't from page 6

### Anaconda Fun Run For Hope September 15

Mark your calendars for the Fun Run For Hope to be held in Washoe Park. Participants can choose to walk or run in a two or 4 kilometer race. Each participant will receive a t-shirt. The entry fee is \$10. Entries must be received by August 31.

Those entering the race are encouraged to gather pledges. There will be prizes available for the top three pledge earners as well as prizes to the top three finishers in each race.

Race time is 10:30 a.m. A barbeque will follow the races and will be held at Washoe Park Pavillion.

**Contact:** Alice O'Donnell, Anaconda at (406) 563-5504 or e-mail her at [xraygrl@imine.net](mailto:xraygrl@imine.net)

### Billings Dinner Fundraiser September 21

The Montana Hope Project will hold a dinner and silent auction at the Perfect Place.

The event will feature a fabulous dinner, entertainment and a wide variety of items up for auction. Some of the items include art work from well-known Montana artists, gift certificates for valuable merchandise and several entertainment and travel packages.

**Contact:** Shawn Hazelton, Billings, at (406) 254-9868 or e-mail him at [spjahaze@home.com](mailto:spjahaze@home.com).

## Hope Project Facts

90 cents of every dollar raised directly benefits Montana children.

The Montana Hope Project is NOT affiliated with any national organization.

The average cost of a wish is \$5,000.

The Montana Hope Project is funded entirely by your donations and local fund raising events.

The Montana Hope Project invites each recipient and their immediate families to an annual reunion held in Essex, on the edge of Glacier Park.

The Montana Hope Project has granted more than 164 wishes since 1984. The project granted 14 wishes in 2000; six have been granted as of May 1,

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