

## 9-Year-Old Collects Cash for Change

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Jay Grelen, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, Sunday, June 10, 2007, B1.

**A**RKADELPHIA — This is his \$16,000 project, this 9-year-old, and he wants to help, but there is only so much a 9-year-old can do.

Before Mason Archer's mother, Linda, brought him into the room, grownups from Henderson State University formed a bank-bag brigade and handed \$16,000 worth of pennies up two flights of stairs to the second floor gym.

Bag after canvas bank bag, each filled with 30 pounds of pennies.

Mason, a third-grader, is the face behind a fundraiser for Mothers Against Drunk Driving. They call it "Think Change."

Mason and his schoolmates at Arkadelphia Central Primary asked for donations of \$2.33. That's 233 — the number of people who died in traffic accidents involving drinking drivers in 2006 in Arkansas.

"I want to help ... people change their minds about their choices," he wrote in his fundraising letter. "If people would THINK before they decide to drink and drive, I think they might CHANGE their minds and make a better choice. ... We can let the whole world know that it is important to THINK and CHANGE their choices about drunk driving."

The money came from all over the country, not just Arkadelphia, not just Arkansas, and in amounts far greater than two bucks and 33 cents.

Goza Middle and Peake Elementary schools raised more than \$2,000 between them, says Charlotte DeWitt, the school counselor who helped the Central students organize.

Early on the morning of the appointed day in April, Russell Lenner, driving a rented panel truck, picked up the 1.6 million pennies from Loomis Fargo and delivered them to the school. Russell is the husband of Donna Lenner, a victim advocate for MADD.

The volunteers from Henderson State handed the 300 bags up the line to the gym, where they set them out in rows on a billboard-size sheet of vinyl, which bore the MADD logo and in large print the words: Think Change. MADD.

Then it was Mason's turn to help. He and his classmates untied the bags and dumped pennies until they created a pile that resembled Arkansas. Ron Winkle took a picture of Mason sitting in the middle of the pennies.

As Linda Archer would note later, in one photograph, with the sun glinting just right, the pennies looked like gold.

Then students from Arkadelphia High helped Mason and his classmates weigh out the pennies, bag them and bucket-brigade them back to the truck.

Mason would have done more. He wanted to do more hands-on for his project. But he couldn't because, well, here's another excerpt from his fundraising letter: "Two years ago, my family was changed because someone decided to drink alcohol and then drive. We were all hurt" .... March 12, 2005. Six days before his 7th birthday. Broken wrist. Severed spinal cord. Henderson State football coach, 26. Blood alcohol content: 0.25. Mason Archer, 9, can't walk or run anymore. But you should see him pop a wheelie in his wheelchair.