



## FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the first worldwide communiqué from Gift of Life International. As a Rotary International-based organization which serves medically needy children throughout the global community, we seek to reach every Rotary International District Governor, and through them, all members of our global Rotary family.

As I look forward to the year ahead, I cannot help but think about the past, and the word that comes to mind, is, dynamic! We have grown from a single Rotary Club saving the life of one child 33 years ago, to an international organization poised to save its 10,000th child this year. We now have a global network of Gift of Life Programs positioned to save the lives of thousands of children in coming years.

This year promises to bring great excitement and challenge to Gift of Life International. In May we will be operating on our 10,000th child. With this milestone we can celebrate the lives that we have saved and the ripple affect that our work has caused around the world. Yet while we celebrate our past accomplishments, we need to dedicate ourselves to developing new strategies that will move our organization to the next level.

This past February we took a major step toward achieving our goal of providing life-saving surgery to 30,000 children within the next ten years. For the first time, Gift of Life International has hired an Executive Director. Rob Raylman comes to us with 20 years of experience in management, fundraising, public relations, and marketing. He will be working with our Board of Trustees to help position Gift of Life International as an organization that provides fundraising, communication and overall support to Gift of Life Programs worldwide. Through the synergy of our coordinated efforts we can bring help to more children than ever before.

In addition, we will use the Internet as a means of raising awareness for our cause and fundraising for our missions. Due to the hard work of (Trustee) Allen Feehan and the technical team at the Ruby Window Creative Group, we have introduced both this newsletter and a completely new website. These will be our tools for communicating our goals and programs to people throughout the world. And we are in the process of developing a fundraising technology that will use the Internet to obtain more donations from more people. (See accompanying article).

As we move forward, our dynamic nature continues. So, with optimism and enthusiasm, let us join together to continue our efforts to reach as many children as possible, and to continually re-dedicate ourselves to our mission of

### **Saving Children's Lives ... One Little Heart At A Time**

Yours in Rotary,  
Robbie Donno  
Chairman

## 21st Century Innovation Helps To Mend Children's Hearts

*Robbie Donno (RD7250) USA*

Stand for Us, Inc. has been working with Gift of Life International to develop ways of enhancing our ability to reach as many people as possible with our message. Stand for Us is a product of what is called the 'ripple effect,' the impact that our life saving mission has on both the children we help and the children in our own communities.

Steve Martocci, President of Stand for Us, grew up in Manhasset, Long Island, the birthplace of the Gift of Life. He had seen and heard of our work for all of his life. After graduating from Carnegie Mellon University's school of Business and Computer Science, Steve had an inspiration of how to dynamically market the Gift of Life in order to help more children. He approached a friend of his family, Robbie Donno, Chairman of Gift of Life International. At that meeting, Steve's idea of Stand for Us became a reality.

This exciting vehicle will allow us to use the Internet as a major fundraising tool. The 'badge' technology uses emails and social networking venues such as Facebook and Myspace to spread the word on behalf of ailing children throughout the world. Every time someone sends an email, the signature badge will appear at the bottom of the email to indicate that the sender is an advocate and supporter of the Gift of Life Program.

When the recipients click on the badge, they will be taken to the Gift of Life page at Stand For Us. They will be guided through our story, and to the process showing them how they, too, can become supporters by making a small donation. Then, each of their emails also will display a badge.

The badge will contain changing messages, keeping its owners continually connected to Gift of Life. When Paul Harris started Rotary, the concept of social networking to benefit others was born. Steve Martocci has now taken Paul Harris' concept and applied it to the Internet.

This viral marketing technology can open Gift of Life's fundraising to possibilities that we never could have imagined only a few years ago. Once this technology is unveiled, we hope all those already involved will use this to help us spread the word .... and create, through the children, a ripple of kindness throughout towns, countries, and continents around the world.

## THE SPOTLIGHT: Russian Gift of Life

*Michael Yurieff, Executive Director, Russian Gift of Life*



Gift of Life International enthusiastically supports the efforts of several sister organizations, among them several 'ethnic' Programs that focus on serving children from their homeland. This edition, we shine the spotlight on the Russian Gift of Life.

Our Mission is to save the lives of the underprivileged children throughout Russia who suffer from treatable heart defects.

The Russian Gift of Life was started in 1989 by a small group of dedicated volunteers. We began in Sea Cliff, New York, in partnership with Rotary Gift of Life Program (RD7250). At that time, we received a generous grant from the United Parcel Service, which brought forty Russian children to America for open-heart surgery.

Today, the Russian Gift of Life is an internationally recognized children's charity with programs in several Russian cities. We have sponsored life-saving heart surgery for hundreds of children in United States and Russian hospitals, and have sponsored numerous medical missions to Russia.

We are funded by the generosity of individuals all over the world. Americans of Russian decent have responded with love, understanding and kindness by volunteering their time to support the Russian children while in America. And we have developed a unique matching gift program that has helped create a tradition of giving within Russia. Thanks to the compassion of our donors and volunteers, the Russian Gift of Life has raised over \$1 million to save children's lives.

We have a long-standing relationship with the Bakulev Center for Cardiovascular Surgery in Moscow, one of the largest cardiac centers in the world. During the last decade, we have saved some 400 children at this center.

Recently, Dr. Leo Bokeria, Chief Cardiac Surgeon for Russia, honored the Russian Gift of Life. He presented to us the gold medal, Bakulev's highest honor, in recognition of our humanitarian work.

And so our mission continues. We are confident that over the long-term most Russian children with treatable heart defects can be saved. We will do our part.

## Exporting Nursing Expertise

*Nancy Cole, MS, RN C (RD7250) USA*

In 2006, several organizations, including Gift of Life International, were involved in providing care to children with congenital cardiac anomalies in the Dominican Republic, at Cedimat and Santiago Children's Hospital. A common goal was the establishment of local centers of excellence for pediatric cardiothoracic surgery.

It quickly became apparent that nurses in the pediatric intensive care units did not have the requisite levels of knowledge and skill to provide quality care to the children, or to educate the families regarding their care. Providing education and training to those nurses would be a critical component of any successful program.

A needs assessment was conducted at the two hospitals. Barbara Sears, MSN, APNP, BC and Nancy Cole, MS, RN C gathered data from pediatric cardiac surgeons, pediatric cardiologists, intensivists, anesthesiologists, and nurses. After an analysis of the data, it was determined that education and training would be required in the following areas: the role of the nurse in the pediatric intensive care unit, reporting and receiving pertinent information from physicians, communication, unit coverage, infection control practices, preparing to receive a patient from the operating room, patient monitoring, and IV therapy.

They also discovered that the nurses did not have the basic items and equipment necessary to provide care to their patients. They lacked stethoscopes, calculators bandage scissors, and watches: basic items that we take for granted in the U.S. Providing those items would not only enhance care, but also instill a sense of pride and increased accountability and responsibility in the Dominican nurses.

Over a 12-month period, Sears and Cole developed the initial Pediatric Nursing Cardiac Surgery curriculum that would be taught to the Dominican nurses. Gift of Life International secured a \$50,000 grant from the Edwards Life Sciences Foundation which provided the funds to produce an educational manual, and have it translated into Spanish. The grant also covered the purchase of the medical equipment that the nurses would need, as well as the cost of the classroom education (25 hours) and clinical training for 28 nurses at both hospitals.

In 2008, nurses at both hospitals will receive American Heart Association certification in Basic Cardiac Life Support and Pediatric Advanced Life Support. Phase II of the curriculum is in development, and will be implemented in 2009.

This program came to fruition through the dedication and cooperation of healthcare providers from various disciplines. The common denominator for all was the desire to develop a training program that would enhance care received by children in the Dominican Republic.



## The Open-Heart Companions

*Based on material submitted by S. Selvi on behalf of RD3270 (Pakistan/Afghanistan) and RD3190 (India)*



Yes, the magic of Rotary has worked yet another wonder!

A unique and complex reconstruction of the heart by Dr. Devi Shetty of Narayana Hrudayalaya, a specialized cardiac hospital in Bangalore, India, has saved the life of a Pakistani boy.

Master Tauseef Ahmed, a fourteen year old from the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, had a life threatening, complex congenital cardiac condition called Pulmonary Atresia, accompanied by transposition of the greater arteries, and a lung that required immediate and intensive medical treatment.

Dr Muhammad Ayub, the National Chairman of Gift of Life (RD3270), referred Master Tauseef's case to the Bangalore Health City Rotary Club (RD3190). Bangalore HC accepted responsibility, and shared the treatment costs with the hospital's Charity Wing.

Dr. Devi Shetty and Dr. Shekar Rao, and their team of expert doctors at Narayana Hrudayalaya Hospital conducted this unique and complex heart surgery on August 22, 2007. They performed a total rectification using a Pulmonary Valve Homograft, and reconstructed Master Tauseef's Heart.

As a by-product of Master Tauseef's case, The Narayana Hrudayalaya Hospital, The Rotary Foundation, and the Rotary Club of Bangalore Health City initiated a joint effort to set up a Cadaver Tissue Bank at the hospital. The Bank will preserve skin, bones, tissues, bone marrow, heart valves, etc. of the human body, to be stored and utilized for poor and needy patients free of cost. Of the cost of US\$165,000, Rotarians will pay about 2/3s.

This case is yet another example of how Gift of Life, working through the global network of Rotary Clubs, can bring people together, when otherwise separated by political borders, to help a critically ill child.

## 14-Year Old EDGAR USTINOV On A Medical Visit From Belarus

*William Currie (RD7230) USA*



On November 24<sup>th</sup>, Edgar Ustinov and his mother, Alena, arrived at New York's JFK Airport from Minsk, Belarus. Members of the New York Rotary Club and Michael Yurieff, President of the Russian Gift of Life, met them at the airport. Edgar was soon to undergo open-heart surgery sponsored by Rotary's Gift of Life Program. His smile broadened when he saw all of us waiting to greet him.

Edgar had been treated at New York University Tisch Hospital (NYU) under the Gift of Life program in 1998. But as he matured, his heart began to fail. Dr. William Novick, founder and director of the International Children's Heart Foundation, saw Edgar in Minsk

last spring while on a Rotary-sponsored medical mission. Dr. Novick quickly recognized that additional surgery was necessary, and that the need was urgent.

Gift of Life arranged for a medical visa to allow Edgar to return to NYU Hospital for this very specialized and difficult surgical procedure. The New York Rotary [Club] Foundation sponsored the surgery and also agreed to pay the expenses of accommodations and meals at the nearby Ronald McDonald House.

Dr. David Meyer performed the surgery on December 6<sup>th</sup>. After almost eight hours of waiting, we were relieved to learn that Edgar had tolerated the surgery well. Dr. Meyer confided to me that Edgar could not have survived much longer than a few months without the surgery that day. Specialists like Dr. Amin at NYU addressed further complications with Edgar's ability to breathe on his own and to use his vocal cords.

Edgar recuperated at Ronald McDonald House, and celebrated his 14<sup>th</sup> birthday on January 27<sup>th</sup> with a party there, sponsored by our NY Rotary Gift of Life members. The following day Edgar and Alena were special guests at the New York Rotary Club meeting where the entire club sang Happy Birthday and celebrated with a large cake and a number of gifts.

We are told that Edgar's prognosis is very good. He and Alena returned home in late February, he with a renewed heart and the ability to continue his studies and live a good quality life, and she with the comforting knowledge that her son will be there for years to come.

## CYNTHIA AKOTH and the SHELTER ROCK CHURCH

*Based on an article in the Manhasset Press, Long Island, NY (RD7250) USA*



Little Cynthia Akoth, who has lived most of her nine years in a mud shack in Kenya surrounded by death and disease, has a new lease on life thanks to a small group of Long Islanders with a big dream.

In this pocket of the world where death is commonplace and life is a constant struggle, members of Long Island's Shelter Rock Church have worked over the past two years to bring health and hope. Among the beneficiaries of their outreach is nine-year old Cynthia. After her father died of AIDS, Church members built a new home for Cynthia and her mother, Linnet. But as they came to know the family, the Shelter Rock team learned that Cynthia had another serious problem.

Born with a hole in her heart, Cynthia had trouble breathing and failed to gain weight even with adequate food available. Her prospects for a normal life were dim. Her community only had two doctors for the population of 200,000. And with many in her community dying from other diseases, the chances of her receiving the necessary care was unlikely.

As part of the Shelter Rock Church team, Robbie Donno, Chairman of Gift Of Life International, made arrangements for Cynthia to be evaluated by a doctor in Nairobi, Kenya. It was at that time that it was determined that surgery was necessary. The Church and Gift of Life representatives quickly made arrangements to bring Cynthia and her mother to the United States for the operation that would save her life.

Now, just one month after she arrived in New York with her mom, Cynthia's health problems are a thing of the past. One February 4th, Dr. Samuel Weinstein, chief of pediatric cardiothoracic surgery at the Children's Hospital at Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx, successfully performed the procedure that had brought Cynthia across the globe. Dr. Weinstein, who has been recognized for his charitable work in conjunction with Heart Care International, commented with a smile: "...she's going to go back home to live a normal life."

Speaking in Swahili, Linnet expressed her gratitude during a service at the Shelter Rock Church. She told those gathered: "You put your hearts together with mine in prayer, and I have seen God perform wonders in my life and in Cynthia's life."

Cynthia and Linnet returned home smiling and thankful to everyone who cared enough to heal Cynthia's heart. And so Cynthia becomes the latest drop of kindness that will continue to cause a ripple through this world for all her days.

## Matching Grant Moves Hospital Closer to Self-Sufficiency



*Ted Krisanda, PDG (RD7470) USA*

*Rotary Club of Minsk (RD2230) Belarus, Republic of Belarus*

*Rotary Club of Morris Plains (RD7470) USA, New Jersey, U.S.A.*

On April 26, 1986, the worst nuclear accident in history occurred when a reactor exploded at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine. The destruction of that facility marked the birth of the Chernobyl Heart.

As is too often the result, it is the children of future generations that suffer the most. Minsk, in the Republic of Belarus, is close to Chernobyl, and an above average percentage of newborns in that area suffers severe birth defects of every type. Congenital Heart Defects are unusually common: The Chernobyl Heart.

For many years surgical teams, led by Dr. William Novick, founder of the International Children's Heart Foundation, have been making trips to the Belarusian Children's Cardiac Center in Minsk to perform open heart surgery on 20-25 children each trip. While there, the teams also provide on-the-job training of local medical professionals in the life-saving surgical and post-op procedures.

But even as the medical staff improved their talent and expertise, they lacked the sophisticated equipment necessary to perform the task. The visiting teams travel with equipment, but because it is all very expensive, they can't leave it behind. One of the more necessary devices is the INVOS 5100C Cerebral/Somatic Oximeter System, a system that continuously monitors changes in the blood oxygen levels in the brain during the surgical procedure. It costs \$30,000.

In response to the need, The Rotary Club of Morris Plains (RD7470) joined with The Rotary Club of Minsk (2230) to seek a grant from The Rotary Foundation to help fund the purchase of the CSO System.

The grant request was approved. FedEx donated shipping costs from the manufacturer, Somanetics Corporation in Michigan, to the medical team's departure point in Tennessee. The team will hand carry it into Belarus, and train the local medical personnel in its use.

The Gift of Life Program of RD7470 has been co-sponsoring the International Children's Heart Foundation's medical missions to Minsk for over four years. The first priority of a medical mission is to save children's lives. The second is to foster self-sufficiency within the local medical community. It's Teaching A Man To Fish!

## Visit Us ... Come Say Hello

*Henry Ebert (RD5340) USA*

**Gift of Life International, Inc.  
The House of Friendship  
Rotary International Convention  
Los Angeles, CA  
June 15-18, 2008**



Recently, Gift of Life International presented a display in the Rotary International Assembly Hospitality Ball Room at the Hyatt Regency in San Diego which was attended by many of the incoming (2008-09) District Governors and their spouses.

We appreciated the attention of three Past Presidents of RI (above, PRIP Stenhammer with three members of the Gift of Life New England Program at an earlier get-together), numerous Governors and many incoming Governors who stopped by and complimented our project and its successes around the world.

This year's turnout was excellent and at times we were swamped! We gave out about 500 brochures and quite a few business cards. We should all compliment the President Elect of Rotary International, Dong K. Lee, for his speech to the new Governors.

He explained, "Our job is simple. It is saving lives with our hearts and our minds and our souls".

He remarked in the January issue of the Rotarian, "Gift of Life is a example of Rotarians' efforts to promote peace and understanding through international service".

In these two statements, President Elect Lee underlined the Gift of Life purpose:

### **Saving Children's Lives ... One Little Heart At A Time**

We look forward to welcoming you to Los Angeles. Please stop by to say Hello.



**The  
Gift of Life International  
Communiqué**

Is published monthly by

**Gift of Life International, Inc.**

475 Northern Blvd.  
Suite 25  
Great Neck, NY 11021

Visit us at

**[www.GiftOfLifeInternational.org](http://www.GiftOfLifeInternational.org)**

Our staff would be pleased to receive your comments, questions and suggestions about our newsletter and our website. Tell us what would be relevant to your District and to your part of the world. Send your email to:

Allen Feehan, Editor

**[editor@golinews.org](mailto:editor@golinews.org)**

To receive more information about our Programs, email your inquiry to

**[info@golinews.org](mailto:info@golinews.org)**

To contribute material for publication in a future issue of Communiqué, email it to

**[editor@golinews.org](mailto:editor@golinews.org)**

If you wish to be removed from our distribution service, please email the Editor from the email address to be removed, and enter UNSUBSCRIBE as the subject.