



**GIFT OF LIFE**  
INTERNATIONAL

# GOLI NEWS

Everything You Need to Know About Gift Of Life International.

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

SEPTEMBER 2009



Gift of Life is a project of founding Rotary District 7250 and participating Rotary Clubs and Districts worldwide.

## Building Bridges Of Friendship From Panama To Boston To Michigan

The story begins in Panama where it is determined that a set of twins require open-heart surgery. Brigitte and Millie were born 3 months premature and each had heart defects. Yisel, the aunt of these little girls, was notified by the pediatric cardiologist that she should contact the Panama Fundacion Obsequio de Vida (Gift of Life Foundation-Panama) immediately for this would be her only hope. Once this request was received by the Gift of Life (GOL) program in Panama, Tom Ford went to work to try to find a hospital that could help these children. Through GOL New England (GOLNE) Tom was able to arrange for Brigitte to be operated on at Massachusetts General Hospital For Children in Boston, MA. Brigitte received her life-saving surgery in February of 2009.

However, that left Brigitte's sister Millie in need of her surgery. Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Jeff L. Myers, who operated



on Brigitte, arrangements were made for Millie to be operated on by surgeons at the University of Michigan Health System in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Ted Shaughnessy and Barry Friedman of GOLNE assured that funding was available for both surgeries. They also took on the role of ensuring that once Yisel and Millie arrived in Michigan they would have Rotarians there to look out for them. In response to a call for help that was put out to all Rotary Clubs in the Ann Arbor area, Theresa Likert of the Saline Rotary Club stepped forward to meet the challenge. Theresa arranged for transportation, lodging and coordinated Saline Rotarians to accompany Mille and Yisel to all of their appointments.

"Being the host family and coordinator of this mission was one of the most rewarding and enlightening events of my life. . . I feel extremely honored to have been involved with this project and thank Gift of Life and Rotary for allowing me the opportunity," says Theresa.

The story of Yisel, Brigitte, and Millie is a beautiful example of the network of caring that has been developed by Gift of Life. Working together Gift of Life International, Gift of Life Foundation-Panama, GOLNE and the Saline Rotary Club ensured that these two little girls from Panama received surgeries which saved their lives – and along the way embraced them as if they were their own!



Saline Rotary Club.

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

**M**y first couple of months as Chairman have been very busy. We have been reviewing, revising, and reorganizing Gift of Life International (GOLI) so that we can meet the demands of our growing international program. In addition to my appointment, six new Directors have been added this year providing GOLI outreach into areas of the United States and abroad that previously were not represented on our Board. The members of our Board of Directors have been instrumental in Gift of Life programs in their respective communities and will bring new insight and ideas to the GOLI program. Having representation from New England to California within the United States as well as Panama, the Dominican Republic, and India emphasizes the "International" in our title.

When Rob Raylman joined us as Executive Director eighteen months ago, Gift of Life International established four guiding principles that would form the basis of our future

efforts:

- The first of those principles was **to maximize the capacity of existing GOL programs.** We have worked with programs throughout the US and many countries around the globe to enhance their ability to help more children. I am confident that in 2009 -10 GOL programs will save more children's lives than ever before.
- The second guiding principle is **to add new programs to our network.** Just this summer, we have added five new GOL programs in: Korea (District 3650), Trinidad (District 7030), East Florida (District 6930), New Orleans (District ) and Kenya (District 9200). More programs mean more children who will live thanks to Gift of Life programs around the globe.
- The third principle is **to develop partnerships with other NGO's.** We are working with a number of GOL programs to provide medical missions to countries in

Central America, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa. We are also working in partnership with groups like the International Children's Hospital in Richmond, VA on programs in the Dominican Republic and the surrounding region.

- The final principle is to tell **our collective story.** It is a wonderful story of how this program that started with one child from Uganda has now helped more than 11,500 children from every area of the world.

As you read this newsletter, celebrate what we have done and be energized for the opportunity to help the most important child in the world – THE NEXT CHILD!

Yours in Rotary service,

Bill

## GIFT OF LIFE HAS ARRIVED IN CALIFORNIA

**A**fter retiring from business in 2005, Estelle and Henry Ebert followed a 30 year-old dream and moved from NJ to La Jolla, California. Henry, however, could not end his 27 year association with Gift of Life. In District 7490 (NJ), he was the first Chairman of his Club's Gift of Life program, the District GOL Chairman and a founding Director of Gift of Life International. When he checked the Rotary Int'l. Directory, he found a listing for the La Jolla Sunrise Rotary Club. After attending several meetings, Henry liked what he saw. He then presented a plan to the Club President, Judi Miller, that the club take on Gift Of Life as a program. She loved the idea and eventually became the Club's GOL Chairperson. Henry knew that he had a daunting job ahead of him. He needed to not only organize his own GOL program in his Club, but he also needed to begin work on broadening GOL's reach within his district and



surrounding states. He enlisted the help of his wife, Estelle, who also had become a Rotarian and his valued assistant.

It took almost two years to find the right venue for the GOL program in San Diego. Local hospitals eliminated themselves, but Gift of Life International came to the rescue. A program headed by Lynda Hammond of District 7980 GOL was looking for sponsors of Mexican Children with heart defects. Lynda and Henry became partners and to date Rotarians in his District 5340 have sponsored 54 children from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Uganda. Henry and Estelle started organizing other clubs in the district and several are now part of the program. They have applied for Foundation recognition in the State of California and are looking to build the program not only in Southern California but throughout the entire State. Henry admits it is not quick or

easy but believes many lives can be saved and Gift of Life belongs in every State and Rotary District.

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475 Northern Blvd. ■ Suite 25  
Great Neck, NY 11021  
Visit us at  
[www.GiftOfLifeInternational.org](http://www.GiftOfLifeInternational.org)  
516.504.0830

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# Gift of Life



Rotary District 7980  
Gift of Life Foundation

The Gift of Life history repeats itself time and time again. Our program in Toluca began when I was introduced to Dr. Humberto Rodriguez-Saldana a tall, handsome Latino from Monterrey, Mexico by Dr. Bill Novick founder of International Children's Heart Foundation during our Gift of Life Outreach Conference in Memphis in October 2005. Dr. Rodriguez was trained in Pediatric Cardiovascular Surgery by Dr. Novick.

For a number of years I have been working with Project Amigo a Rotary-based non-profit in the State of Colima, Mexico. This project is dedicated to providing educational opportunities and healthcare support to some of the poorest kids in Mexico. I mentioned to Dr. Rodriguez, that on occasion we have kids with congenital heart defects in need of surgery, and it's becoming more and more difficult to get kids operated upon in the States. He simply stated, that 'no child needing cardiac surgery should have to go to the States, we can perform these procedures in Mexico'. At the time, neither of us had any idea where that simple statement would take us almost three and a half years later.



## Gift of Life Toluca Project

In early 2008, Dr. Rodriguez was informed that there were 90 kids in the Toluca region of Mexico (south of Mexico City), on the waiting list for cardiac surgery and the list was growing. Needless to say, our focus became the "Toluca Gift of Life Project." This was the largest project we have undertaken and frankly it was a tremendous challenge. As committed Rotarians... the only response we know is YES we will find a way to provide each one of those kids with the *Gift of Life!*

It became clear to Dr. Rodriguez, continuing to bring the kids to Monterrey one at a time for surgery, was not the answer and the costs were far too great. A plan to bring Dr. Rodriguez to the kids of Toluca was established. However, first the capabilities of the hospitals needed to be evaluated for this type of patient care. Therefore, the program began by performing simple closed heart procedures and progressing to more complex open heart surgeries as the staff became comfortable with the pre and post-operative care required for these little ones. The first surgery was performed in May of 2008. By May of 2009, Dr. Rodriguez had given 120 kids the *Gift of Life!*

Dr. Rodriguez obtained the support and guidance from the Mexican government, in particular the Ministry of Health and the Hospital administration in Toluca, prior to beginning this project. It cannot be stressed enough, if a program is to be sustainable, it must have the government as a partner from the beginning. In mid June 2009, following the completion of 120 successful heart surgeries, the Mexican government announced they would assume the full financial responsibility for the Toluca program, thereby making it sustainable!



The success of this project must be credited to Rotarian Humberto Rodriguez, MD, who not only performed the surgeries but managed the program brilliantly, providing us a template for future similar projects.

Thank you to the following for your support, Rotary Gift of Life Districts 7260, 7470, 7980, Gift of Life International, Gift of Life New England, Rotary Clubs of Hamden, LaJolla Sunrise, Monterrey and Torreon Laguna.

Dr. Rodriguez and I were so very fortunate and grateful to have had the personal blessing and support of the late PRIP Dr. Carlos Canseco member of the Rotary Club of Monterrey, a true Rotarian who will be greatly missed.

Submitted by: Lynda Hammond, President Rotary District 7980 Gift of Life Foundation

## Giving the gift of life

# TWO AFRICAN CHILDREN RECEIVE MEDICAL AID

by Charlee Beasor

**BROWNSBURG** — Though two small African children may not yet realize the gifts they've received, a host of other people are well aware of their second chances at life.



Don Zimmer holds Joyce, one of the most recent Gift of Life patients, while his wife Crystal looks on at a Brownsburg Rotary Club meeting Thursday.



Innocent, 3, sits in his mother, Prossy's, arms at the meeting Thursday. He had heart surgery and will return to Uganda soon.

Innocent Naggita, a 3-year-old boy from Uganda, recently received heart surgery to repair tetralogy of fallot, a congenital heart defect that causes a hole in the membrane between the two chambers of the heart.

"He was merely not developing because of his bad heart," said Jim Graham, a member of Brownsburg Rotary Club and the board of directors for Gift of Life International. "He was not gaining weight, he was exhausted and couldn't play, couldn't run."

Gift of Life International is based in New York and is a non-profit organization that was formed to address the medical needs of children who suffer from congenital heart defects and similar conditions. The program is largely run through the efforts of Rotary Clubs throughout the world.

Naggita was flown to Indianapolis after Gift of Life International decided to start a campaign where 50 children from Uganda were given life-saving surgeries. He was chosen by a screening team that was sent to Uganda and was then

flown to Riley Hospital for Children for his heart surgery.

Now, thanks to the surgery, Naggita is healthy and should live a normal life. His mother, Prossy Naggita, accompanied her son to Indianapolis and they've been staying at the Ronald McDonald House.

"I'm happy because of the people here," she said. "I'm happy for the gift of life and for me. (He's doing) very fine. He will start school next year."

Innocent and his mother will return home on Tuesday.

"I went up to see Innocent this morning," Graham said. "He recognizes me and he came running toward me and when I said good-bye, he gave me a big hug around the legs. It really touches you."

Though Innocent has a family back home in Uganda, the other child that was part of the Gift of Life International program, Joyce, was abandoned on the steps of a hospital in Kenya. Her host family, Don and Crystal Zimmer of Broad Ripple, said they think she is about 22 months old.

The Zimmers were in Kenya during part of Don's medical training when they first encountered Joyce.

"Joyce had been abandoned at the hospital and Crystal spent a lot of time with her," Don Zimmer said. "She was nine pounds, not eating well, not growing."

Joyce has a cleft palate, and Don said once they found a special bottle she could use, she began to eat.

"She started to eat, but still wasn't growing, and we found out she had a heart defect as well," he said.

The Zimmers contacted Riley Hospital and officials there put them in touch with Graham. He and Sarah Ellen Mamlin of Pike Township worked to get Joyce to the United States for her heart surgery. Mamlin is the wife of Dr. Joe Mamlin, who has about 100,000 HIV patients under his care in Africa, Graham said.

"It took a while to get everything approved, but we got it pushed through with the assistance of Joe and Sarah Ellen Mamlin," Don said. "They deserve a lot of the credit."

Joyce went directly from the Indianapolis International Airport to the hospital, where she had her heart repaired on May 6.

"Everything happened pretty fast," Don said. "She spent two days in ICU after the surgery, but she's done great since. She's gained two and a half pounds, so she's growing. Her cleft palate will be done mid-June at Riley."

Once Joyce's cleft palate surgery is done, her legal guardians in Kenya will travel here to take her back home in August.

"The Gift of Life is not a conduit for adoption, and we'll keep in touch, but when you open yourself up, you find yourself stuck," Don said. "She wouldn't have survived the surgery after another six months, the doctor said. It will be really hard, but it was the lesser of two sad outcomes (for her to go home to Kenya)."

Joyce and Innocent are numbers 137 and 138 in the series of children that Brownsburg Rotary and Gift of Life International have helped by providing conduits for life-saving surgeries.

"They will have a normal life because of this," Graham said. "Their hearts are good."

For more information on Gift of Life International, visit the website at [www.giftoflifeinternational.org](http://www.giftoflifeinternational.org). For more information on the Brownsburg Rotary Club, visit the website at [www.rotary6560.org/bb.htm](http://www.rotary6560.org/bb.htm).

[charlee.beasor@flyergroup.com](mailto:charlee.beasor@flyergroup.com)