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Jewish Day School Sports Stars



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Israeli doctors helping repair children's hearts

By ELISE SHEPPARD
26.NOV.09

The news media would have it that when Israeli Jews and Muslims from neighboring countries meet, violence is the only outcome. The reality is quite different.

This past winter I spent three weeks in Israel volunteering with Save a Child's Heart, an Israeli-based international nonprofit humanitarian organization which provides lifesaving treatment to children with congenital heart defects. Most of the children are Muslims from Africa, the Palestinian territories (Gaza and the West Bank), Jordan and Iraq.

Other children come from Moldova, Russia, China, Vietnam, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. SACH transports, cares for and treats the children for free. The organization also trains medical personnel from those countries, enabling them to care for their own patients at home. Since its inception in 1995, SACH has treated more than 2,100 children from 36 countries; 1,000 more children are currently wait-listed for treatment.

There are two upcoming, free photo exhibits in greater Houston from Save a Child's Heart. The exhibits contain 45 large (2-1/4 feet by 3-1/4 feet) professional photos taken of the child-patients in their home countries before going to Israel, in the operating room, and during various stages of recuperation.

During the month of November, Lone Star College – CyFair Branch Library will host the exhibit. Along with the photos, there is a DVD station with three continuously playing video news clips created and aired by Israeli TV stations, highlighting some of the patients and doctors. The programs are in Hebrew with English subtitles. Lone Star College–CyFair is located at 9191 Barker Cypress Rd., Cypress, Texas. For directions, call the Library Reference Desk, 281-290-3214 or 3218. The exhibit is sponsored by the college's branch library's Windows on the World, Save a Child's Heart, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Consulate General of Israel to the Southwest.

From Dec. 1 to Jan. 18, 2010, the exhibit moves to Rice University's Student Center, Farnsworth Pavilion. There will be a Glatt Kosher reception, open to the public, on Tuesday, Dec. 8, 6 to 8 p.m., with guest speaker David Litwack, executive director, Save a Child's Heart, U.S. For directions, call the Student Center Information Desk, 713-348-4096. Major donors and sponsors include SACH, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Consulate General of Israel to the Southwest, Jewish Federation of Houston Community Relations Committee and Micromed Cardiovascular, Inc. Also, assistance from Rice University Owls for Israel, Houston Hillel and The Boniuk Center for the Study and Advancement of Religious Tolerance.



David Silverman

Ayomide, 5-1/2 years old, traveled from Nigeria to Israel for lifesaving surgery.

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SACH does not provide free medical treatment beyond its own borders, at the expense of those in need in Israel. "Israeli citizens have health insurance, regardless of their financial situation, and they are entitled to receive free medical care," said Sach's director of international relations, Tamar Shapira. "The treatment that SACH provides to children from developing countries is not on the account of Israeli children; it is in addition to. The Israeli children will receive health care whether SACH exists or not. 'We can and we should' was the motto that the late Dr. Ami Cohen, founder of SACH, believed in. We have the knowledge and the ability to save lives of children with heart diseases - therefore we must do it!"

SACH reaches out to people of all religions. "We at Save a Child's Heart believe that every child, regardless of his/her origin, religion, color of the skin or financial situation deserves to live and our mission is to save as many children as possible," said Shapira. "Save a Child's Heart does not have a political agenda - we don't deal with politics, borders, roadblocks or conflicts - we save the lives of the children. If, in addition to the fact that we save the children and help the countries develop medical abilities, we manage to help bridge the gaps between people, then this is a benefit. There is no problem or conflict between the people; you will find in our project Israeli and Palestinian doctors working together; Muslim, Christian and Jewish children living and playing in one house and mothers from totally different backgrounds and religions supporting each other. There is no room for politics when you are dealing with saving lives of children."

For more information on Save a Child's Heart, go to www.saveachildsheartus.org .

Elise Sheppard, elise.j.sheppard@lonestar.edu, is a librarian at the Lone Star College-CyFair, in Cypress, Texas. The library is a partnership between the Harris County Public Library System and Lone Star College-CyFair. For more, go to www.lonestar.edu.

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