

## Gift of Life Northeast Ohio--Update

*"For every child in Africa with HIV/aids, there are 6 to 8 children born with congenital heart disease, most of whom can be cured with just one surgery".* **Dr. Hani Hennein**, (past Chief of Pediatric Cardio Thoracic Surgery at Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital Cleveland Ohio) 2003



How does a pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon from Georgia end up performing open heart surgery on children in Africa with a medical team from Cleveland?

It happens when you get involved with Gift of Life Northeast Ohio, Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization originating international children's heart surgery projects from within **Rotary District 6630**.

Dr. Mohsen Karimi is leading Rotary District 6630's **Gift of Life Northeast Ohio** (<http://web.me.com/golneo/>) medical brigade to **Mater Hospital in Nairobi, Kenya**.

When Gift of Life Northeast Ohio started in 2003, we partnered with University Hospital's Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital and a team of generous pediatric surgeons and medical team members, to bring children and their families from the developing world to Cleveland for life-saving heart surgeries. Through the years, Gift of Life treated more than 50 children who have gone on to lead healthy lives, rather than have their lives cut short due to lack of medical care in their home countries.

As time passed, our surgical partners grew to include Dr. Hani Hennein, Dr. Ahmed Forouk, Dr. Mohsen Karimi and Dr. Alex Golden. They helped us realize that we could vastly increase our ability to save children's lives by taking the care to them. So, we set a goal to establish and equip World Children's Heart Surgery Centers in regions of the world where we could partner with local teaching hospitals, and train the local centers to operate on their own.

The first opportunity came about when Dr. Ahmed Farouk, a young pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon and professor from Assiut University in Egypt came to Case Western Reserve University as a PhD fellow in connection with Dr. Hani Hennein, then head of Pediatric Cardiothoracic Surgery at Rainbow, and a Gift of Life supporter. Dr. Farouk got involved with Gift of Life NEO and conceived the idea to make Assiut University the site of the first World Children's Heart Surgery Center.

Last year, Gift of Life NEO set up Assiut University in Egypt as the first World Children's Heart Surgery Center. Dr. Ahmed Farouk led the effort. Thanks to our partner, MedWish International, which repurposes used medical equipment and provides it to health care providers around the world, the center at Assiut University is fully stocked with equipment to perform cardiothoracic surgeries for the children of Egypt. Additionally, the center has received two medical brigade

visits, made up of trained pediatric cardiac surgeons and nurses, teaching the Assiut team through more than 30 children's surgeries. Egypt's Children's Heart Center is now performing close to 100 pediatric heart surgeries each year on its own with success ratios comparable to operations performed in Cleveland. This spring, Gift of Life NEO began establishing its second World Children's Heart Surgery Center, at Mater Hospital in Nairobi, Kenya. It started with the shipment of a 40' container filled with MedWish medical equipment, which began its long voyage in April. The shipment was organized and packed by members of the Chagrin Valley Rotary Club, who take a team of volunteers to MedWish each month to sort and pack medical equipment and supplies.

After crossing the Atlantic, Mediterranean and Indian oceans, the shipment arrived in late July.

Enter Dr. Mohsen Karimi, now Chief of Pediatric Cardiothoracic Surgery for MCG Health and a professor of Surgery & Pediatrics at Emory University in Georgia. Dr. Karimi co-authored many research papers over the years with Drs. Hennein, Farouk, and Golden, and was inspired to join the Gift of Life team. He carries on the work of Dr. Hennein, who died unexpectedly last year, and will lead a team of medical professionals arriving on Saturday August 27<sup>th</sup> to dedicate the new heart surgery suite and new equipment in Dr. Hennein's honor. Dr. Karimi's team will continue the teaching and training process at Mater hospital and report back to Gift of Life NEO in the Fall to suggest additional equipment and skills needed to sustain the surgical team at Mater and children's heart surgery in Kenya.

With our second children's heart surgery center a reality in Kenya, Gift of Life Northeast Ohio is making a difference in many more children's lives than we ever dreamed. Our sincere thanks to Drs. Hennein, Farouk, Golden and Karimi for their generosity, support and dedication to saving the lives of children around the world; and to MedWish International for helping equip the centers.



Dr. Mohsen Karimi's team includes Cardiologist Alex Golden, pictured at left, and several ICU and surgical nurses from the Cleveland Clinic.





Grace Agwaru is Rotary's global ambassador for Gift of Life and Chair of District 9200's Gift of Life East Africa. East Africa's Rotary District 9200's team has raised funds to support the children much as our District has when they come for heart surgery. She and DG Eric Kiman and DGN Geeta Manek 9200 will hold a ceremony on September 2, 2011 honoring Dr. Hani Hennein's work in previous brigades to Nairobi, accepting the equipment for East Africa's Gift of Life program and make a donation of 700,000 Kshs towards Gift of Life East Africa.

Gift of Life North East Ohio, Inc. is a Rotary District 6630 501(c)3 that provides life-saving heart surgeries to children from around the world. Established in Northeast Ohio in 2003, Gift of Life NEO has brought more than 50 children and their families to Cleveland for open heart surgery at University Hospitals Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital. Gift of Life NEO is supported by more than 30 Rotary Clubs in District 6630, led by the Hudson, Geneva, Port Summit, Cleveland, Mantua, Chagrin Valley, Chardon, Burton- Middlefield, Lakewood, and Rocky River clubs, many of which have supported this effort for multiple years.

If you want to learn more about Rotary District 6630's Gift of Life Northeast Ohio program and how your club can participate by donating medical equipment at MedWish or linking with Gift of Life NEO surgical teams in the developing world, call PDG Jim Frame, 330-2740-2482; Ken Fogle 216-861-5151; or Jim Kamer at 216-789-3462. Or, email at [ken.fsa@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ken.fsa@sbcglobal.net).

