

# Donors help agency ride to rescue of children

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STATEN ISLAND, NY -- ALL SHORES -- Last night, some 75 local philanthropists saw a side of the world they might not have ever imagined.

They saw tragedy. They saw pain. They saw suffering.

But amidst all that horror, they also saw hope.

And, believe it or not, that beacon shines brightly out to the world from right here in Staten Island.

The Global Medical Relief Fund (GMRF), founded by Arrochar resident Elissa Montanti, held a benefit last night at Beso Restaurant in St. George.

The GMRF, a small, non-partisan organization, provides access to health care for children from around the world who are victims of war, natural disasters and other misfortunes. The group works as an emissary to foreign nations, presenting a softer side of America than some have seen.

Unlike many fund-raisers, though, the GMRF was able to put the organization's accomplishments and future goals squarely on display for all to see.

They were cut into the frames of a film produced and edited by Kenan Malkic -- a native of Bosnia who lost his arms and a leg after stepping on a land mine at age 14, but was brought to the Island by the GMRF. He received treatments and prosthetics, and is now doing his part to help others like himself.

It was in the wide eyes of 8-year-old Mei Fei Xiang -- a native of China who lost her left leg and suffered internal damage in a truck accident, and was brought to the United States by the GMRF. She has had reconstructive bladder surgery and is currently learning to walk again with a two-piece prosthetic.

It was in the voice of event chairman and West Brighton resident John Gustafsson -- who passionately spelled out the mission of the GMRF and its desire to broaden the scope of the aid it provides.

As that passion and appreciation permeated the room, those in attendance couldn't help but open their hearts.

Attendees made monetary donations, offered items to be auctioned and volunteered their time and resources.

"We have people (here) from the corporate world, from the private sector, from the entertainment world, from everywhere," said a beaming Montanti, whose group has helped over 76 children in just a little more than a decade of work.

That cross-section of Island support was exactly what the GMRF directors were hoping to bring in when they set up the event.

"We have brought the world to Staten Island, and we are very proud of that. This is a personification of the future of Staten Island and the contributions it can make to the global village," said Mo Sacirbey of St. George.

The backing generated last night will help support an even greater event set for June 2009, called "Our Children's Film and Art Festival."

That celebration should serve as a milestone accomplishment for the GMRF because it will allow the children who have been able to focus on living -- rather than just surviving -- to tell their stories themselves through film, photography and other forms of artistic expression.

"I'm fortunate and lucky," said Malkic. "Even with the injury, I've gained more than I lost. It's not about arms and legs. It's about how you see yourself. It's about how you perceive things."

And last night, Staten Islanders stepped up to empower him further.

(Those interested in contributing to the GMRF can contact the organization via its Web site at [www.gmrfchildren.org](http://www.gmrfchildren.org).)