

# War kids' savior



Gregory P. Mangano

**ANGEL OF MERCY:** Elissa Montanti with Kenan Malkic (left) and Ahmed Sharif, two war victims she helped provide with prostheses.

## S.I. woman brings hope to maimed youngsters

By RITA DELFINER

When a 7-year-old Iraqi boy lost his right arm and eyesight after being caught in the crossfire between American forces and guerrillas, a U.S. Army major in Baghdad called Elissa Montanti.

"She said, 'Can you help this child?'" recalled Montanti, founder of the Global Medical Relief Fund, who has made it her life's work to bring children who have lost limbs due to war or natural disaster here to be fitted with prostheses.

"I picked Ahmed Sharif up at the Iraq border. The poor kid was holding on to his teddy bear. It was

heartbreaking," said Montanti, who depends on donations.

"I do it on a prayer," said Montanti, a Staten Islander who has brought 52 children here since 1997 and sends them home with prosthetic limbs and eyes.

Montanti, a 2002 Liberty Medal nominee, was nominated again this year for the Ambassador Medal by Paul Nicholls, a 2004 winner.

Last year, Montanti brought Ahmed to the United States, and he was fitted with an artificial arm at Shriners Hospital in Philadelphia at no cost. She said Ahmed, now 9 and learning Braille, also re-

ceived prosthetic eyes through New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia.

All the children return annually to be refitted until they stop growing.

Ahmed's here now, staying with Montanti at a Staten Island facility provided by Mount Manresa Jesuit Retreat House, where she runs the program.

"He's a regular little boy," she said. "You want to eat him up."

Montanti was first moved to help the children of war in 1997, when she read a letter written by then-14 year-old Kenan Malkic, whose arms and a leg were

blown off when he stepped on a land mine in his native Bosnia.

"He's the reason I started this," she said of Malkic, whom she brought here to be fitted with artificial arms and a leg.

Malkic, now 24, attends college in the city and will soon graduate.

"All the children I bring here look up to him and say, 'If he could do it, I can,'" she said.

For more information, visit [www.globmed.org](http://www.globmed.org).

[rita.delfiner@nypost.com](mailto:rita.delfiner@nypost.com)

