



silive.com
Staten Island Live

Staten Island-based Global Medical Relief Fund, Rep. Michael McMahon step up for Haiti

By **Judy L. Randall**

February 16, 2010, 6:59AM



Photo courtesy of Elissa Montanti

Dr. Montanti takes a break in one of the hospital tents, where temperatures reached as high as 115 degrees during the day.

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- With four young Haitian earthquake amputees being treated in Philadelphia's Shriners Hospital for Children, under the banner of Staten Island-based Global Medical Relief Fund, and three more in need of prosthetics on the way, GMRF founder Elissa Montanti is asking borough residents for assistance.

"We are in this for the long haul," said Ms. Montanti during a meeting yesterday with board members and Rep. Michael McMahon at Mount Manresa, Arrochar, where this home-grown relief organization is based. "We are incredibly thankful for the help we have received, but there is more to do."

Much more.

Ms. Montanti, of Arrochar, created GMRF 13 years ago to help some 90 children in dire medical need whose world was shattered by war or natural disaster, in Bosnia, Iraq, the Congo and now Haiti.

She and her uncle, Dr. Vincent Montanti of Dongan Hills, spent last week in Haiti, in hospitals and tented MASH units that dot parks, sidewalks and streets themselves where many victims remain after last month's devastating quake.

Unsanitary conditions make recovery painful and slow and reinfections prevalent, Ms. Montanti said. The temperature hovers at 100 degrees and food and water still are not plentiful. The smell of death, she said, hangs in the air.

"It is like going to hell and back," said Ms. Montanti. "It is very sad, but it actually makes you work harder."

With the rainy season approaching, she added, things are bound to get worse



Staten Island Advance/Jan Somma-Hammel

Ms. Montanti sought the help of McMahon (D-Staten Island/Brooklyn) to speed passage to Shriners for some of the children who need it most. During their recovery they will convalesce, as others have before them, at Mount Manressa.

"For some of the worst injured earthquake survivors, hope lies only in the lifesaving treatments available in U.S. hospitals," McMahon told Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano in seeking "humanitarian parole" to bring the children here for a period of three months to get the care they need. "This initiative will be completely privately funded and will allow these children to be transported to the U.S., treated, housed and returned to Haiti at absolutely no cost to the American taxpayer or our health system."

Still, Ms. Montanti noted that of all the charitable groups on the Island only Mount Manresa and Richmond County Savings Foundation have provided assistance to GMRF in the past.

GMRF board member Muhamed Sacirbey, a former Bosnian ambassador to the U.N. now residing in St. George, said the children who are helped "become goodwill ambassadors" on behalf of the U.S., adding, "Most Americans are willing to impact one individual at a time."

For more information about the group, or to contribute, visit www.gmrfchildren.org.

© 2010 SILive.com. All rights reserved.

Elissa Montanti, left, the founder and director of the Global Medical Relief Foundation, thanks Rep. Michael McMahon, center, and his office for their help with Haiti victims. She recently returned from Haiti with her uncle Dr. Vincent Montanti, far right.