The Staten Island home that love and angels built

Published: Friday, August 03, 2012, 6:00 AM   Updated: Friday, August 03, 2012, 8:35 AM

By Michael Sedon/Staten Island Advance
Follow

Enlarge   Jan Somma-Hammel

Elissa Montanti, left, and contributor Carol Williamson opens her Dare to Dream House for children of her Global Medical Relief Fund. (Staten Island Advance/ Jan Somma-Hammel)

Dare to Dream House on Staten Island gallery (9 photos)

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- Some people dream of a better world. Others turn their dreams of a better world into action.

Count Arrochar resident Elissa Montanti among the latter.

She and her Global Medical Relief Fund celebrated a milestone Thursday with the official opening of their "Dare to Dream House."

The house, also in Arrochar, will shelter young victims of war and disaster -- their families, too -- while they receive medical treatment.

Children who have lost limbs to land mines or improvised explosive devises, who have been caught in the crossfire of warring factions or who have suffered life-altering injuries in earthquakes and tsunamis find hope for a new life through Ms. Montanti's charitable work.

"I have the hospitals; I have the children; I need a home, because for so many years I've relied on generous, kind people to house the children," Ms. Montanti said. "This day is the true definition of a milestone."

Throughout the past 14 years, Ms. Montanti has worked diligently to connect with children in desperate need of medical attention and prosthetic limbs. All told, she has helped 150 kids from 22 countries.

The Advance has faithfully chronicled her work, and she got a big boost from a "60 Minutes" segment.

"We have two wonderful benefactors [Miles Nadal, through his company, MDC, and Tyler Perry] who saw the segment ... and contacted me on what my needs were," Ms. Montanti said.

A network of doctors, hospitals, donors and volunteers help the children free of charge through some very complicated surgeries, and now, through the generosity of benefactors, as many as four children and their families can stay in the Dare to Dream House for operations and yearly follow-up visits.

"We help until the kids are 21," Ms. Montanti said. "So although we've helped 150 kids there's been about 1,000 visits."

The house also offers children and their families a chance to forge friendships that would not have been possible otherwise.

"Little Ahmed, who's now 15 and blind and lost his arm, is now holding on to Ngawang, who lost two arms," Ms. Montanti said. "He became his shepherd. You walk into the house and it's love, and that's what it's all about."

Ahmed, from Iraq, and Ngawang, from Tibet, are sharing the house with Dalal, from Iraq, and Bryan, from El Salvador.

"I'm very happy today about Elissa," said Ahmed, who is on his third visit since he was injured when he walked into a firefight. "I love Elissa like my mother."

The children come recommended to her by soldiers, disaster relief volunteers, doctors and reporters from around the world.

Staten Island's Dare to Dream opening
Elissa Montanti's Dare to Dream House opens where her Global Medical Relief Fund patients stay to recover in Arrochar.
Watch video

Ms. Montanti wanted to extend her thanks to her many supporters, some of whom were on hand, including one of her earliest supporters Carol Williamson from Huntsville, Ala., and Nadal, the Shriners Hospital, Perry and many others.

Ms. Montanti's big Thursday also included a celebration of the release of her new book. She received a proclamation from the City Council presented by Councilwoman Debi Rose (D-North Shore) and a Woman of Distinction recognition from the state Senate presented by a representative of Sen. Andrew Lanza's (R-Staten Island).

Also at the opening were Borough President James Molinaro and state Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis (R-East Shore/Brooklyn).