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Daring to Dream on Staten Island

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"What higher mission is there in life than helping an injured child?" asked Elissa Montanti yesterday at the ribbon cutting for the Dare To Dream House on Staten Island.

Ms. Montanti, author (with Jennifer Haupt) of the new book, *I'll Stand By You: One Woman's Mission to Heal the Children of the World*, has almost singlehandedly helped more than 150 children injured in war and by disaster, accident and illness, for the past 14 years.

Or, as she puts it, "14 years and 60 Minutes." Because it was a *60 Minutes* report in March 2011 that caught the attention of the two benefactors who were responsible for the purchase and renovation of the Dare To Dream House, writer-director Tyler Perry and Miles Nadal, CEO of MDC Partners. Nadal said that while he was watching that *60 Minutes* broadcast he was "emotionally overwhelmed", and thought to himself, "We have to help her." And with the donations from Perry, Nadal and MDC Partners, the Dare To Dream House became a reality less than a year and a half after the broadcast first aired.

Nadal brought a yellow school busload of his MDC Partners employees from their Manhattan office, and spoke to the diverse crowd of supporters gathered at yesterday's dedication. "It's easy to make a living, Nadal said, "it's hard to make a difference. Elissa Montanti is a gift from God, a saint."

The new house will be home to injured children from around the world while they undergo extensive medical treatments from a volunteer network of doctors, nurses and hospitals. And all children helped by Montanti's [Global Medical Relief Fund for Children](#), are considered lifetime members of the GMRF family, which offers them help and treatments until age 21.

Ms. Montanti turned to the children she had helped to heal, as they stood together in front of the new Dare To Dream House and said, "They're the heroes." One of the children, Ahmed, told the crowd, "I love Elissa like my Mom."

But despite her enthusiastic supporters and donors, obstacles and challenges can sometimes make her selfless journey a difficult one. Government red tape can still delay bringing the children to Staten Island for treatment. And although Ms. Montanti and GMRF are now embraced by the Staten Island political establishment and most community residents, there have been hate mails from some who question why she should be helping children "who will grow up to become terrorists."

But on a warm, sunny day yesterday at the new Dare To Dream House on Staten Island, Elissa Montanti looked out at the crowd of young and old, rich and poor, able bodied and disabled, and saw that as she continues to stand by the children of the world, her supporters will be there to stand by her.

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