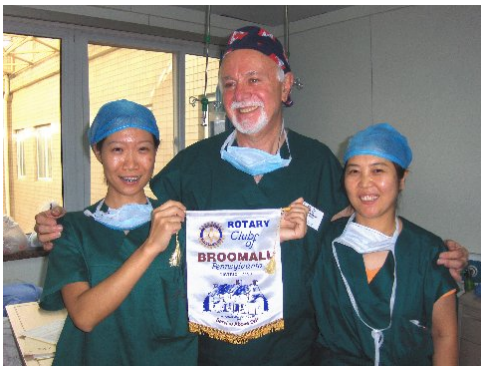
Broomall Rotarian Brings “Happy Smile” to China



Broomall Rotarian With American And Chines

Doctors And Nurses

Date: November 6, 2009

The Broomall Rotary Club is a sponsor of Rotoplast (Rotary – Plastic Surgery), which provides corrective plastic surgery for children with the birth defects of cleft pallet and cleft lip (also known as hare lip). This year, Broomall Rotary club member Paul Quintavalla and other Rotary volunteers assisted a medical team in Shijiangzhuan City, China to correct such birth defects. The surgeons performed 171 procedures on 116 children to correct the disfiguring and debilitating conditions.

Most of the children were between the ages of one and five years old. The youngest were five months and a few were in their early teens. They came from poor sections of the city and villages that were up to eight hours’ bus ride away. Because they were poor, families stayed in the wards with their children. The hospital did not provide meals, so parents brought food from street vendors.

This surgery is literally a life changing procedure that the families could never provide for their children. Cleft pallet greatly inhibits speech and affects eating and drinking. In third world countries, children with cleft lip disfigurement are often abandoned to state orphanages at birth. They have no chance of marriage and poor chances of a good career. Corrective surgery allows them to rejoin society and have a normal life.

Rotary members saw a six-year-old bolt upright in the recovery room, looking startled. The hole in this pallet that opened his nasal passage to this mouth had been closed. The nurse from Arkansas said, “He is breathing normally for the first time in his life and doesn’t know what to make of it. Don’t worry, he’ll get used to it.”

One afternoon, a mother was brought to recovery to comfort her little girl. In the first moments, she claimed the child wasn’t hers because she didn’t recognize the girl. A moment later she realized it was her child and the tears began; as they often did in the recovery room.

This was Rotoplast’s second mission to China, which the Chinese government calls, “Happy Smile Charitable Program.” The news media for the city of nine and a half million people covered the event thoroughly. It even made the front page of their newspaper. The fact that most of the mission’s “experts” were Americans received particularly positive attention. The Chinese people, especially the younger generation, are up-to-date on American news, wear Americanized clothing, think Yao Ming is great and speak some English with an American accent. The Rotoplast mission certainly helped to bolster America’s image in that community.

Rotoplast provides surgery without charge to underprivileged families. The medical team of eighteen professionals consisted of plastic surgeons, pediatricians, anesthesiologists, dentists, a speech therapist and nurses. Nine volunteer Rotarians from clubs in Broomall, Conshohocken, Kennett Square, Media, Twin Valley and Central Chester County, which are within Rotary District 7450, supported them. Everyone participates without compensation and the Rotarians travel at their own expense for the eighteen-day assignment. This is the tenth consecutive year that the district has supported a Rotoplast mission. The cost of the mission is over $100,000. Earlier venues included India, Peru, Ethiopia, Egypt, Viet Nam and the Philippines. Rotary Clubs raise funds to support Rotoplast and other services internationally and in their communities.

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