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MDA Honors Holmdel Doctor Tricia Gilbert With “Visions of Hope” Award

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

(HOLMDEL, N. J. – JUNE 17, 2011) – The Muscular Dystrophy Association of Monmouth and Ocean Counties is proud to announce it has presented this year’s “Visions of Hope” Award to Holmdel’s Dr. Tricia Gilbert, for her life-saving dedication to the 1,001 children living in the African village of Mbirizi, Uganda.

For the past four years, Gilbert has volunteered with Sylvia’s Children, a non-profit founded by Holmdel businesswoman Sylvia Allen, and has not only enhanced the living conditions and well-being for the children attending the Mbirizi Advanced Primary and Day Care School, but in fact has even saved lives.

“It is a tremendous honor to be chosen as MDA’s Vision of Hope,” said Gilbert, a Pulmonary and Critical Care Specialist at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital. “I think I can speak on behalf of my entire team. These children changed our lives forever. They are the true vision of hope.”

In March 2010, Gilbert traveled to Mbirizi, Uganda, along with a bevy of nurses and other medical volunteers, where she helped to set up a makeshift medical clinic.

After encountering various hurdles, such as having only four days to examine over 1,000 children, and having no supplies on-hand, Gilbert enlisted the help of her colleagues from the New Brunswick Medical Community and Colleagues from Robert Wood Johnson as well as Ranbaxy Pharmaceuticals to have everything from diagnostic medical equipment and nebulizers to wound care supplies donated.

In total, thanks to the nurses at Robert Wood Johnson, Gilbert was able to collect over \$25,000 in medical supplies. She then recruited a medical team, consisting of a retired EMT and three nurses, to join her on the mission.

After putting together five stations for the children to file through, and a support team stateside including cardiologists, surgeons, dermatologists and pediatricians, Gilbert was able to first utilize her team of nurses to identify children with distinct medical issues, and then treated them, wrote up follow-up care plans or sent them into the nearest city with money for more advanced care.

“The kids were so beautiful. They had smiles that melt your heart. They were full of joy just to be alive and to be able to attend school.” she said. “If my team was able to bring them just a bit more and make their lives more comfortable, we accomplished our goal.”

Gilbert continues to raise money for the clinic, through Sylvia’s Children, and has been supporting the students who need medical attention by financing their trips to the city clinic. Since her travels, two children, who would have otherwise died without necessary medical attention, have survived due to surgery provided by the organization and Gilbert’s team. The organization is now working to provide an on-site clinic staffed with a permanent physician, which they hope to have completed in the near future.

Each year, the MDA presents its “Visions of Hope” Award during an extraordinary evening of gourmet food and wine tasting, art, a fashion show and a live auction. In the past, close to \$100,000 has been raised for the organization, in just one night.

Over the past eight years, Sylvia’s Children has raised a staggering \$400,000, all of which has gone directly to the Mbirizi Advanced Primary and Day Care School, and its children. It has donated a well and a fully stocked library; provided a corn milling business; donated Internet-equipped computers; constructed a dormitory with triple-decker bunk beds; have a chicken farm providing children with much needed protein; built a playground; provided sporting and musical equipment; and built three additional double classroom blocks as well as providing a full-time nurse and new stoves for increased cooking efficiency.

The mission of Sylvia’s Children is to create a self-sustaining model in African entrepreneurship, which can then be provided to schools in surrounding villages. Allen’s near-future plans are to finish the model with a uniform sewing trade, a computer center, an arts and crafts cooperative, and a medical clinic, which will all allow the school to be completely self-sustainable.

For more information on Sylvia’s Children, visit www.sylviaschildren.org (732 946 2711).

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