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'One person can make a difference'

Hills pharmacist's charity helps orphans, children of Iraq

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In one video clip, an Iraqi toddler injured by a bomb lies in his hospital bed crying until Nidhal Garmo picks him up. Clinging to her, the child, most likely an orphan, falls asleep on her shoulder almost immediately.

In another clip, an Iraqi woman wrapped in bandages, disfigured from burns and unable to speak, reaches out her hand to Garmo, who has said she will look into plastic surgery for her.

They are two of the reasons that Garmo, of Farmington Hills, is planning a seventh trip to the country to help those who are victims of the war there.

It's not easy, she admits.

"I cry a lot," she said.

But the help is much needed, she said.

"There are five million orphans, mostly wounded."

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Garmo, who owns Nidhal Pharmacy in Farmington Hills, at first collected her own supplies to help. She donates many over-the-counter drugs and some prescriptions, such as for sugar diabetes. Then she began making her trips with the help of Detroit-based World Medical Relief and the Assyrian Medical Society.

Because of them, she has brought much needed medical supplies to Iraq — everything from surgical beds to prostheses and medicine.

She accompanies each large container shipment to make sure nothing is lost or stolen.

Most recently, she formed her own nonprofit group, For Victims of War and Poverty. According to the FVWP Web site, it's "to help those who are in need of medical attention due to the war, but can't afford to live and people in poverty in general."

While she has been focusing on Iraq, she aims to expand her help to other countries.

The group hosts its first annual fund-raising gala dinner today, Thursday, June 18, at Farmington Hills Manor.

She will be thanking all those who have helped her, including the speaker, Iraq's ambassador to the United States, H.E. Samir Sumaida'ie.

Rita Montgomery Grezlik, president and CEO of Detroit-based World Medical Relief, which collects

and distributes surplus medical supplies, says Garmo has worked with the organization for some time.

“She is so very passionate in helping people, she's very vibrant,” she said.

She said that World Medical Relief began 54 years ago with founder Irene Auberlin answering the call to help Korean orphans. Now it helps 130 developing nations.

“In a way, she reminds me our founder,” she said. “The basic, bottom line is one person can make a difference.”

A DESIRE TO HELP

Garmo said her desire to help others started early. She can remember watching television, as a child in Iraq, and crying for hungry kids in Africa and the suffering children in Palestine.

Garmo and her family immigrated to the U.S. in 1980.

She married, had a daughter, Raquel, 22, worked her way through Wayne State University and became a registered pharmacist in 1990.

At one time, she owned three pharmacies. She sold one in order to help pay for her trips, each of which costs over \$50,000.

“I feel like God responded to me,” she said of her mission.

Garmo knows she faces dangers in Iraq such as sectarian bombs.

“People say, wait till things get better,” she said. “That doesn't make sense. Why go then?”

She added, “I'm not into politics. I enjoy it when I make a person smile.”

MEDICINE, HOPE NEEDED

Before the war, she said, Iraqis never locked their doors and had the best schools and hospitals in the Middle East. Now, “people are hungry, they need money. They're desperate.”

Many get ill because of the poor quality of water and lack of sanitation, she said, which have contributed to outbreaks of hepatitis and cholera.

“We have a lot of doctors in Iraq, who don't have jobs. They don't have surgical supplies.”

There are also no simple medicines, like pain killers or aspirin.

Garmo welcomes donations and volunteers for her trips. Sometimes just being there gives them hope, she said.

The video has another clip. It's of Rafid, who was about to go into a coma, from a liver disease.

She took him to a hospital in Iran, which was able to treat him.

“He still needs a liver transplant,” she said, “but he is better.”

He's another reason she'll continue on her mission.

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