



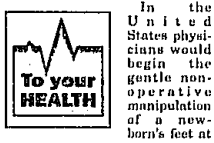
It's Jose's feet

Child receives gift of love, health from doctor and family

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Jose's feet are severely deformed.

The 2 1/2 year-old from the Dominican Republic was born with club feet — a congenital condition, that in his case, has resulted in the inward growth of his feet.



In the United States physicians would begin the gentle non-operative manipulation of a newborn's feet at one to two weeks of age who was suffering from the same deformity.

Unfortunately in Jose's country adequate medical resources or funds are not available where he lives. The consequence is that countless children go without treatment, have operations that in the long run hinders their development or in rare cases like Jose's — come to the U.S. for free orthopedic surgery.

Thanks to the generosity of podiatrist Dr. Lawrence Fallat, the organization Healing the Children® and the Thompson family, Jose and a handful of other children have received the "gift of health."

From the beginning

Healing the Children® is a national, non-profit corporation founded in 1981 that provides free medical services for needy children around the world.

According to Cindi and David Thompson, a Healing the Children® host family from Taylor, their involvement with the organization began five years ago through the encouragement of an acquaintance.

"I knew the woman through Girl Scouts," said Thompson who recalls she graciously turned down the invitation to host a



STAFF PHOTO BY LINDAN MITCHELL

Pre-op: In photo at left, anesthesiologist Dr. Mike Gruessen of Oakwood Hospital Annapolis - Wayne performs some routine tests on 2-1/2-year-old Jose Tinea of the Dominican Republic. Jose, shown beaming above, was about to undergo orthopedic surgery to correct his severely deformed feet.

child for two years prior to welcoming the first boy into her home in 1994.

"We have four children of our own and were working on a old house we bought that never seemed to be in the right condition for a young child," said Thompson. "When the time was right we cared for two boys from Mexico the first summer, ages 9 and 11. Once you try it you can't say no."

In the past five years the whole Thompson family has accepted children from both Mexico and the Dominican Republic who were brought to the U.S. for orthopedic surgery. "We get a lot more out of this than the children do," said David Thompson.

The youngsters are referred to the Healing the Children® program via helping agencies established worldwide, through

screening programs conducted by teams of volunteer physicians and nurses and through individual plans. Every May approximately 100 children are flown to the United States and assigned to various families in Michigan as well as New York and Ohio.

For Jose the May arrival date marked the beginning of what could be at least a six month stay. The bashful but beaming toddler is currently recovering from the June 29 surgery to correct what Oakwood Healthcare System podiatrist Dr. Lawrence Fallat called a "rigid deformity so severe he was walking on the

top of his feet."

Fallat says his ability to provide both the surgery and the follow up medical services free of charge came without hesitation from the Oakwood Healthcare System. The Taylor podiatrist says the medical staff he works with has showed nothing but support in favor of those types of goodwill endeavors.

"Oakwood Healthcare System has been very cooperative and has made it so easy," said Fallat. The staff from administrators and doctors to anesthesiologists and nurses have exhibited a can-do attitude. They share a spirit

and comradeship and they love the little children."

Jose's surgery, which lasted approximately 3 hours, required Fallat to lengthen the Achilles tendon, release joint capsules and lengthen tendons. Two temporary pins, protruding from his skin, were set to help maintain the correction. The pins will be removed next week and a second cast will be made for each foot.

The casts, according to Fallat, hold the foot in the corrected position to promote upward and forward healing.

In the three weeks since the surgery Thompson says Jose "likes being King on the couch," and hasn't been very motivated to walk. Fallat attributes that to the temporary pins in his feet that will be removed this week. The podiatrist expects him to be on his feet shortly after.

Jose is expected to be in casts for about three months depending on the progress of the correction and more than likely will be fitted with braces to keep his legs from turning inward — a common occurrence following surgery of this nature.

Big-hearted

Both the Thompson's and Fallat credit the other with the continued success of their union with Healing the Children®. In truth, the partnership would not be successful without the commitment made by both parties.

"We're really appreciative of Dr. Fallat and what he's able to do for these children," said Thompson. "He says it wouldn't be possible for this to happen without us but in reality it's him that's making this all possible. We open our home to Jose and love him. Dr. Fallat's the one who makes him better so that he can go home a happy and health little boy."

The Healing the Children® organization is well-known in regions of the Dominican Republic and at the Clinica Corazones Unidos near Santo Domingo

See JOSE, B3

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