

Bronx Rotarians open their hearts to save a young child

by Jennifer Procario

The Rotary Club of the Bronx has once again opened its heart to a family in need, tending to a young Haitian boy's failing heart and bringing the child and his family back to life.

Joaninior Henock Fify, 14, of Petit-Goâve, Haiti, suffered from rheumatic heart disease, a condition that damages heart valves. He left his native land with a slim hope of being cured, but thanks to several Bronx do-gooders, he will be returning with his heart

— and faith — restored.

"The surgery was successful," said Dr. Samuel Weinstein, director of pediatric cardiothoracic surgery at the Children's Hospital of Montefiore Medical Center, who played a large role in saving the boy's life on Tuesday, January 9.

The rheumatic heart disease caused severe leaks in Fify's aortic and mitral valves, so to allow his heart to function properly, doctors replaced each valve with mechanical devices. Fify was due to recover with-

in a week or 10 days of his surgery, Weinstein said.

Fify's amazing turnaround began when Susie Scott Krabacher, who runs the Haiti-headquartered nonprofit Mercy and Sharing Foundation with her husband, Joe, spotted the young boy and immediately noticed how sick he was.

Upon returning to America, she contacted the Bronx Rotary Club, which participates in the larger Rotary's renowned "Gift of Life" program, whose primary

purpose is to help children in medical need through open-heart surgery in America.

Once Montefiore agreed to admit Fify — the Children's Hospitals handles roughly 20 to 25 charity cases a year — local Rotarians organized the boy's trip to the Bronx. Joaninior is the fifth child the Bronx Rotary has hosted through this program.

Traveling with his father, 47-year-old Yves Fify, the boy was uneasy about his first trip to the United States but agreed to schedule corrective heart surgery.

"He would have rather had the treatment over there, in Haiti," the father said through a translator, Antonio Bernard. "He was a little scared about coming, but he is grateful for the program and the opportunity. He had said he's coming, and God willing, he'll be coming back."

Now, as his child recovers from his surgery, Yves Fify said he too feels more at ease.

"I feel that in the hospital I am within a family that embraces and supports me during this time of need," he said. "The doctors have explained the whole procedure and I have more hope today."



Dr. Samuel Weinstein of the Children's Hospital at Montefiore Medical Center greets Joaninior Henock Fify, 14, and his father, Yves, who came to the Bronx for Joaninior's corrective heart surgery. — PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ROTARY CLUB OF THE BRONX/JP

At home, Fify's mother, Manise Fontin Fify, 52, and his younger brother, Roddy Fify, 10, await Joaninior's safe return.

"She's been very sad but feels a little better because of the progress so far," Yves said of his wife.

Before receiving word regarding this program and opportunity, Yves

said the only chance his son had was through his faith.

While in the Bronx, the Fifs are staying with Megan Charlop and Richard Powers, who have already hosted two previous families for the Gift of Life program — exemplifying the Rotary motto: "Service before self."