

October Runover Triathlon Program, October 12, 1997

SHRINER'S HOSPITAL FOR CHILDREN

Helped by October Runover

by Steve Hamlin

Last February, Linda and I took a drive to the Springfield Unit of Shriners Hospital for Children to present them with their share of the money raised at the '96 October Runover (the proceeds being divided equally between them and the Western Mass. Food Bank). We could have just mailed it, but Bernadette White, the Public Relations Director, insisted that we should come to a Board of Directors' meeting to be formally recognized. We walked into the meeting which had already begun (my fault) in the middle of a presentation by Chief of Staff, Dr. John Roberts.

Dr. Roberts was discussing the recent back surgery performed on a young Greek girl. The thirteen-year-old had a severely deformed spine which would prevent her from enjoying a normal life. Pre-surgery photos showed her hunched and twisted back. The young girl was in attendance throughout the presentation, allowing her results to be inspected. She had gained two inches in height due to the surgery and stood tall and straight. She shyly thanked the doctor and the staff for her new chance for a happy life. It was an uplifting demonstration of the level of care that the hospital provides.

The most remarkable aspect of this story, though, is that there was no charge to the young girl, her family or any insurance company. She was flown from Greece, after which she was operated on, given therapy and schooling, all at the Shriners Hospital and all free. Any child that is given medical help at the hospital has the benefit of all these facilities at no cost. In this day of escalating health costs and dwindling health care choices, how can they do this?

It is independent fundraisers like this race and the efforts of the many Shriners Temples that make it possible. The hospital is not allowed to raise money directly. It may seem odd that while the services are given so freely, there seems to be no means to recoup the associated costs. This separation has the refreshing result of freeing the staff to provide the patient with the needed care regardless of individual costs while eliminating the temptation of over-treatment for fiscal reasons.

As I watched the doctor and his patient, followed by a procession of benefactors being honored for their support or delivering their checks, I was struck by the enormity of the work being done. I was humbled to realize what a small drop our contribution was. When our turn came, though, Chairman Alan Zippin received us and our check like he had everyone else that day. We were made to feel like the whole affair centered around us.

As we left the hospital after the meeting and a quick tour, I was proud to have played a part in giving that young girl, as well as many like her, a chance at happiness. I hope you will too.