

COSMETIC CHARITY

TWO SURGEONS AND A DENTIST PROVE THAT A VOCATION IN BEAUTY CAN BE USED TO GIVE SOMETHING MORE
BY SUSAN WILLIAMSON



Dr. Joshua J. Charlat

Is it better to give than receive? According to the most recent figures released by the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, most of us seem to think so. An impressive 91 per cent of Canadians donated a total of \$5.4 billion in the year 2000. And 6.5 million of us volunteered 66 or more hours of our time. It must be especially rewarding when we have a transferable skill, like the cosmetic surgeons and dentists who share the benefits of their expertise with those less fortunate.

Scarborough-based plastic surgeon Dr. Time Sproule has been actively involved in volunteering for over a decade. Since 1991, he has been travelling to developing nations to donate his surgical skills. "Plastic surgery is tailor-made for third world countries," says Sproule, who believes that reconstructive and cosmetic surgery are not as different as we like to think. "They're both based on skill and artistic ability, and they improve a patient's quality of life," he observes.

When he was a volunteer for Interplast, the charitable arm of the American Academy of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (ASAPS), Sproule travelled to Ecuador, Peru, Vietnam and Bangladesh, operating mainly on trauma cases and people with congenital birth defects. On one of his five surgical visits to Bangladesh, Sproule took along two of his children so they could see firsthand what it means to give back.

Even though Sproule was committed to Interplast, starting his own charity had always been in the back of his mind. "In 1998 a friend suggested I visit Guyana," recalls Sproule. "There are no resident plastic surgeons in that country, so he thought I'd be interested-and he was right." The ever-intrepid Sproule packed up his instruments and headed south. While he was in Guyana, he operated on 17 people who were suffering from burn injuries or cleft plates.

The following year Sproule approached the director of Guyana's largest hospital and pro-

posed that they open a burn unit making use of his expertise and support. Because he had headed up the burn

unit at Scarborough General Hospital and worked at other top-notch facilities in Europe and North America, he felt uniquely equipped to deal with the project. "My mandate there is to save lives and also to improve the quality of life for burn victims," explains Sproule.

The 4,000-sq. ft. facility opened in Georgetown, Guyana late last year. It includes a dedicated operating theatre and a burn isolation room - both designed by Sproule. He's also developing a nursing and physician training program which will be connected to him in Canada via the Internet. Sproule doesn't feel that he's unique in donating his time, through. "Anytime I give a talk, 60 to 70 per cent of the doctors present come to me afterwards and offer their services. Most of us love what we're doing and feel fortunate we have a skill that can help others."

Cosmetic facial surgeon Dr. Peter Adamson is another Toronto-area doctor who puts his heart behind his scalpel. Since 1994, Adamson has travelled to Russia eight times with the Face-to-Face Program sponsored by the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (AAFPRS). "Face-to-Face assists children with congenital and traumatic craniofacial problems, many of whom are orphans who go on to be adopted after successful surgery," explains Adamson.

"When I'm in Russia, I do ear and nasal surgery, and our team works to correct conditions such as cleft palates, as well as removing abnormal growths and dealing with the effects of serious injury," he says. The trauma cases are particularly challenging: a young girl hit by part of a missile while riding her bicycle, the toddler whose nose was gnawed off by a rat and a boy who developed a serious infection after his skull was fractured. These three children - and many more - have all benefitted from the expertise of Adamson and his col-

leagues. Face-to-Face doctors also make time to share the latest surgical techniques with their Russian counterparts. "They learn from us and we learn from them, so it's not just a one-way street," he remarks.

Impressed with this humanitarian work, a facelift patient of Adamson's provided a generous donation to set up the Canadian Foundation for Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, of which Adamson is president. When he led a team of medical personnel to Russia last October, the Foundation provided funding for part of the mission. "It covers the cost of our nurses and facilitators, plus the supplies and equipment we take along with us. But the doctors involved-in this case, six surgeons and an anesthetist-pay all their own expenses."

Closer to home, dentist Dr. Joshua Charlat is actively involved in setting up the Canadian arm of the Give Back A Smile program. Charlat, who focuses on cosmetic work in his midtown Toronto practice, explains that the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry set up the program in 1999 to assist victims of domestic violence - mainly woman and children. "About 75 per cent suffer head and neck injuries," he reveals. "Cosmetic dentistry can be an important part of the healing process. It restores self-esteem and helps build self-confidence."

The way it works in the U.S.-and will shortly work here - is that those in need phone a toll-free number (1-800-773-4227) and are recommended to a dentist in their area who donates his or her time. So far, several dentists in Toronto and Vancouver are onboard, along with two dental laboratories. "We'll be treating broken and severely damaged teeth, and the fallout from traumatic injury that requires bonding veneers and crowns," says Charlat. "It's a great opportunity for me to give something back to the community."

For more information on these charities, contact:

- Dr. Tim Sproule, 416-439-1718
- Dr. Peter Adamson, Adamson Associates, 416-603-6005
- Dr. Joshua Charlat, 416-415-2429