

LOCAL NEWS

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For a family in need, an outpouring of love

Spearheaded by businessman Charles LaGanga, a host of Island benefactors come to the aid of a disabled Rosebank girl

BY JUDY L. RANDALL
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

Calling the "outpouring of love" from a host of Staten Island benefactors "really amazing," the father of a severely disabled girl said his family is poised to have their lives transformed through the donated addition of a handicapped-accessible suite designed specifically for his daughter in their Rosebank home.

What's more, 6-year-old Alexia Trimarchi has already received a specially equipped van funded by local donors and a national charity moved by her plight — something that has made trips into Manhattan for her various medical treatments easier for parents Rosina and Joseph Trimarchi to manage.

The donations, Joseph Trimarchi said, are the result of publicity generated by the Advance on the eve of a fund-raiser friends held for his daughter last fall, which caught the eye of Todt Hill businessman Charles LaGanga.

It didn't take long for LaGanga, who is well-known on the charity circuit here, to wield his special brand of magic and convince big-hearted acquaintances to pledge themselves to making life for Alexia and her parents a little easier.

TRULY TOUCHED

"In my 48 years of doing this stuff, I don't think I have ever been so happy," said LaGanga. "This story touched me the most."

Alexia was born with spastic quadriplegia cerebral palsy, mental retardation, a seizure disorder and gastrosomy deficits, as well as visual and verbal impairments, rendering her in constant need of assistance.

Today she receives physical, occupational and feeding therapies.

As her mother, Rosina Trimarchi, has explained, "Most of the premature babies she was with in the hospital had complications, but she had all of the complications."

She had eight surgeries in her first six weeks of life, and countless more procedures since.

Most recently, her father explained, "Alexia had hip surgery on both hips. Because she doesn't walk, her hips kept sliding out of her sockets."

Afterward, she developed a fever that spiked to 105.6 and was placed on intravenous antibiotics for six weeks. She is currently on the mend at home.

While the Trimarchis have been taking it "one day at a time," as Joseph Trimarchi likes to put it, LaGanga's "leadership in putting together a team of great people" has been the answer to their prayers.

"Charles LaGanga has started Staten Island's own 'Extreme Makeover Home Edition,'" said Mr. Trimarchi. "He is a person with a big heart. We are lucky that he came into our lives."

For starters, LaGanga reached out to Manhattan architect and friend Tom Campiglia, who has designed a 600-square-foot addition to the family's modest Hylan Boulevard home, including a handicapped-accessible bedroom and bath with a separate shower and tub.

COMFORTABLE SPACE

"If you are building an environment for a child who will be there for the rest of her life, you want it to be a comfortable environment," explained Campiglia.

Hence the floor-to-ceiling windows with awnings that will permit cross-ventilation and can remain open even when it's raining; radiant heat on the floor, where



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE/BILL LYONS

Alexia Trimarchi, center, is surrounded by her parents, her sister and a group of benefactors who worked together to obtain a van and renovate the Trimarchis' Rosebank home. Holding Alexia's hand is Charles LaGanga, who helped convince some of his big-hearted acquaintances to pledge themselves to making life for Alexia and her parents a little easier.

Alexia likes to relax and has therapy and, perhaps most important of all, what Campiglia describes as an overhead rail carrying system with a hammock-type sling called Sure Hands that will lift the growing girl from bed to bath. He also designed extra-large closets to hold her medical and therapy equipment.

Expediter Doreen Rizzi of Oakwood, another LaGanga friend, saw to it that all plans and permits have gotten the OK of the Buildings Department.

"I'm a single mom and this is my area of expertise," explained Ms. Rizzi simply. "I love the idea of being able to give back to the community."

"Giving back" is what

motivated Jerry Smith, of Prince's Bay-based J. Smith Construction, to sign on as the general contractor.

"You gotta help out," said Smith. "People are in need, and you gotta give back. Staten Island is where I was born; this is where I live."

Another LaGanga pal, Nino Cutillo of Nino's Auto Repair/Getty in Dongan Hills, is lining up subcontractors to work with Smith.

"Concrete, electric, plumbing," explained Cutillo.

All of the work, which is expected to take up to three months, will be done pro bono, although donations, like lumber and windows, would be gratefully received, noted architect Campiglia.

And because of Alexia's love of music, he added, "We want to be able to install an audio system. Hopefully there will be a donation."

Helping LaGanga keep things on track are his friends in the Staten Island Kiwanis community, most notably Todt Hill attorney Carl E. Tavolacci.

Meanwhile, after the Advance story appeared last November, the Carmine DeSantis Foundation donated \$18,000 toward the purchase of a handicapped-accessible van "with all the bells and whistles," said spokeswoman Michelle DeSantis, including an electric ramp.

Add to that some \$20,000 the Trimarchis and friends

amassed at their fund-raiser at The Cup in Stapleton, and an additional \$10,000 the family solicited from the Sunshine Lady Foundation run by Doris Buffett, of the philanthropic Buffett family, and the family's dream van became a reality.

Additionally, Beverly Neuhaus of Richmond Senior Services in Westerleigh will see to it that a wheelchair porch lift is installed at the family's home once the renovations commence.

Said Trimarchi: "There are a lot of great people in the world. This is an incredible outpouring of love."

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