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Responding to great need

Philanthropist donates \$10,000 to aid December tsunami victims

By Kevin Smith, Staff Writer

SOUTH PASADENA -- Like father, like son.

When philanthropist Robert Wagner recently donated \$10,000 to AmeriCares for the tsunami-aid effort, the South Pasadena resident was surprised to learn that his son, Richard, also has worked with the nonprofit organization.

"The lady who handles large donations for AmeriCares asked if I was Dr. Wagner and I said, No, that's my son, Richard," Wagner said. "He's an ear, nose and throat surgeon."

Richard Wagner, 49, lives in Whidbey Island near Seattle, Wash. He worked with AmeriCares to help coordinate future humanitarian relief for Suriname, South America, and is involved in humanitarian aid missions through Global ENT Outreach (www.geoutreach.org). Robert Wagner, 82, former president of the South Pasadena Rotary Club, past president of the South Pasadena chapter of the American Red Cross and a former delegate to the 1995 White House Conference on Aging, said he was moved to contribute money to the tsunami relief effort after watching coverage of the disaster on TV.

"I was mesmerized to see the horror of the little boys and girls wandering around," he said. "Then I was reading a Wall Street Journal story on tsunami donations and the organization they mentioned at the top of the list was AmeriCares ... so I made an unsolicited donation."

The money was warmly welcomed, according to Catherine Onyemlukwe, director of major gifts for AmeriCares.

"We're always very grateful for donations like this," Onyemlukwe said. "We've received about 150 gifts of \$10,000 or more and about half of those came from companies. The level of giving that we're seeing for the tsunami is unprecedented."

AmeriCares' first airlift to India in response to the tsunami arrived in mid-January, carrying 36 tons of medicines, medical equipment, water purification treatments and other aid valued at nearly \$8 million.

"So far, we have received \$20 million in donations for the tsunami," Onyemlukwe said. "We've delivered about \$12 million in medical supplies and equipment. We are able to leverage the dollars so well."

Estimates of the number of people killed by the Dec. 26 tsunami that struck 11 nations has ranged from about 162,000 to 178,000 -- most of them in Indonesia.

Another 26,000 to 142,000 are missing, but officials say it's too early to add them to the toll with bodies still being found. Indonesian authorities said Tuesday they had found 1,055 more corpses, raising the country's confirmed death toll to at least 115,756.

Robert Wagner arrived in South Pasadena in 1954 and became well known as the owner of Squires, a wine and spirits shop. Over the years, Wagner emerged as a top wine merchant, catering events for the White House, Bob Hope and the Bing Crosby Show.

-- The Associated Press contributed to this report. Kevin Smith can be reached at (626) 962-8811, Ext. 2701, or by e-mail at kevin.smith@sgvn.com.



An Acehnese man uses shovel to clean up mud from his house in the tsunami-battered village of Kajhu near the provincial capital of Banda Aceh, Aceh province, Indonesia, Saturday, Feb. 5, 2005. More than 110,000 people were killed after earthquake and massive tsunami hit the region on Dec. 26 last year. (AP Photo/Dita Alangkara)

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