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SHARING THE *gift*

A NEWSLETTER OF GIFT OF LIFE TRANSPLANT HOUSE

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gift of life



GIFT OF LIFE
TRANSPLANT HOUSE

A HOME THAT HELPS
AND HEALS

From Serbia to Rochester A Long Way from Home

By *Jeff Hansel*

Veljko and Branka (Mihajlovic) Samolov were television journalists in Serbia before the war there in the early 1990s. Even as the country recovers from the battle wounds today, the Veljkos are fighting their own battle – against Veljko's cancer.

They've visited Rochester several times since 2007, when Veljko, now 65, received a heart transplant. It was two days before New Year's Eve when they got the call that a heart was available. His own heart's function had dipped as low as 10 percent of capacity and hovered at 24 percent.

When he awoke from the transplant, his wife said, he opened his eyes and gave a thumbs-up sign. Both knew immediately that he would be OK. They're especially thankful to their health providers and a young man from Iowa whose organs were donated after his death, including the new heart for Veljko. The past four years have been ones he would not have experienced without the transplant.

Wars like the one in Serbia, as seen on television from 5,000 miles away in Rochester, can mask the effect upon individuals. During the war, Veljko and Branka lived in Prague in the Czech Republic. In the lead-up to the war, they joined other journalists in Serbia to start a pro-open government, anti-war journalism organization that published information online, and they eventually became radio news reporters for Voice of America.

They're proud of their work during the war because they know many in their homeland made life-or-death decisions on their reporting. Their jobs, they said, require

confirmation of facts from three

sources before the information is put on the air, so residents could rely on the reports. During the war, their son, Miloch, a Serbian actor who is now 37, stayed home in Serbia after they moved to Prague. One fateful night during a Voice of America all-night war broadcast, Branka, now 62, was reporting when she read on-air that a building just 164 feet from their own building in Serbia had been bombed. Her thoughts went immediately to her son, and she looked at the control booth window, where her husband stood. He wrote on a paper and held it to the window. "He put on the paper, 'Miloch is OK,'" Branka said.

Veljko's health improved after his transplant at Saint Marys Hospital. "It was a chance for a very, very good part of

Continued on page 2



Veljko and Branka (Mihajlovic) Samolov

our life that is different,” Branka said. But troublesome pains near his ribcage proved to be cancer of the lung and bone. He returned to the *Gift of Life Transplant House* in Rochester while getting follow-up care and received radiation treatments.

The pain is gone, but the cancer isn't.

Today, Veljko, who is retired, and Branka, who continues working for Voice of America, are scheduled to return to Serbia to visit their son. While here, they've become part of the Rochester community, joining a weekly gathering at a local restaurant and making friends at Mayo and *Gift of Life*.

They came to the U.S. because heart transplants were not available in Serbia in 2007. It was made possible through international health insurance Branka had through her Voice of America job. Without it, Veljko believes, he would have died years ago.

“It was a miracle. Two or three days after (the transplant) he was walking,” Branka said.

Reprinted from the Rochester Post Bulletin

Editor's note... Branka and Veljko have since returned to Serbia but will be back at the GOL in the near future.

WINTER WISH LIST

\$25 for a guest room night
 Full size vacuum cleaner
 Compact fluorescent light bulbs – 60 & 100 watt
 Paper towels
 Facial tissue
 Forever stamps – 44 cents



Postcard stamps – 29 cents
 4 pack toilet paper
 Table napkins
 Paper plates
 Ziploc bags, assorted sizes
 Hand sanitizer
 Liquid hand soap



Liquid dish soap
 Regular & decaffeinated coffee
 Coffee creamer
 Individual packs of Splenda, Equal, or Sweet'n-Low
 Crystal Lite lemonade
 Wrapped candy, especially chocolates



President's Letter

By Cheryl Lavin-Meyer

This is my first letter as Board President, and although new to this position, I am not new to *Gift of Life*. I have been involved with *Gift of Life* since 1995. I have had the opportunity to assist with many remodel and expansion projects over the years as well as co-chairing the Golf Committee. We have seen many changes over the past 15 years. We have grown to a 'campus' with multiple buildings enabling us to provide much needed lodging for more transplant patients. Expansion has its challenges including a mortgage. The board, staff, and guests are very thankful to the benefactors for their contributions and we hope that you keep us in mind as the holiday season approaches. Proceeds from the Christmas card mailing offset our operational costs and help to make our mission possible.

In May we had another change. Sister Jane, after twenty years of service to *Gift of Life*, retired. We are very grateful for her leadership and ministry over the years. She recently moved to Florida and is undoubtedly enjoying the warm weather. Many thanks to her.

Vicki Allen joined us in June as the new Executive Director. She brings many years of experience in non-profit organizations, fundraising and management. If you have not had a chance to meet her, I would encourage you to

stop by and introduce yourself the next time you are at *Gift of Life*. She and her husband hosted a Hawaiian Luau dinner recently and a Halloween Chili Supper. Rumor has it that a Cinco de Mayo Party is another possibility...stay tuned!



Our two major fundraisers, the Golf Tournament and the *Taste of Life* Wine Tasting Event went well. Though our sponsorships were down, a good time was had by all. The raffles and auction items were exceptional. If you have not had the opportunity to join us at one or both of these events, please consider it next year. We would love to see you there.

I would like to thank Bob Groettum, Past President, for his leadership, patience and guidance over the last two years. He will remain on the Executive Committee as a valuable resource. I look forward to the next two years serving as president. As you know, Gift of Life Transplant House is a wonderful "home away from home" and it is our goal as board members to maintain the integrity and hospitality established many years ago. I welcome this new opportunity and hope to meet many of you in the months to come.

Back Where I Belong

By Vicki Allen

“Back where I belong” is the key phrase for new Executive Director, Vicki Allen. Vicki took over the leadership of the Gift of Life Transplant House on June 6th. For the last eleven years, Vick has worked as Marketing and Development Director for PossAbilities of Southern Minnesota. Her career there allowed her to continue her passion for helping people, specifically those with disabilities. Prior to that job, Vicki worked for the American Cancer Society. In her ten years as staff for ACS, she traveled all over Southeast MN working with cancer patients and survivors. “Watching the Hope Lodge being built in Rochester was a highlight of my time with ACS”, says Vicki. Now, she has come full circle to once again being associated with a “Home Away from Home” for patients and caregivers.

Vicki has a knack for management as well as strong skills in marketing and development. “I am blessed to have found this job and have the opportunity to lead such a wonderful group of dedicated staff and volunteers. Their commitment to the guests we support is truly amazing. Having the opportunity to provide a temporary home for over 1000 people a year is very humbling and rewarding.”

Originally from St. Charles, MN (30 miles away), Vicki has spent her entire life in the Rochester area

except for vacation travel and student exchange programs. As a Rotarian and member of several boards of directors, Vicki enjoys her life in Rochester with her husband, Terry Sorenson and their two grown sons. They are a family committed to their community and to volunteerism. Vicki has a Masters Degree in Professional Development/ Counseling and a B.S. in Sociology and Corrections. Her twenty-four years of non-profit and fundraising experience will be a great asset as she leads the Gift of Life Transplant House. Vicki became involved with Gift of Life two years ago when her dear friend of twenty years developed multiple myeloma. Her friend, Kim, and husband Mike, stayed at the GOL Transplant House for seven weeks while going through a stem cell transplant. Vicki and Terry became the personal chefs for their friends and dropped off nightly meals. “I saw what the Gift of Life meant to Kim and Mike and I wanted to be part of it, said Vicki. And with God’s blessing, I am now able to be part of the continuum of leadership and caring.”



Vicki Allen

“A Taste for Life” ~ Recipe for a Delicious Event

8 Sponsors: K & M Glass, Brentwood Inn & Suites, CRW Architects & Design Group, Heartman Insurance, US Bank, Express Personnel Professionals, Kuehn Motors and Merchants Bank

7 Friends: Davies Printing, Dunlap & Seeger, HGA Architects and Engineers, Olmsted National Bank, Post Bulletin, SignHere, Smith, Schafer & Associates

1 Elegant Venue: With outstanding service, appetizers, and dessert provided by the Marriott Hotel

200 Wines, Beers & Spirits: Organized by Silver Lake Liquor and their Distributors

83 Silent Auction Items: Donated by Generous Businesses & Friends of Gift of Life

1 “Vine of Life” Wine Tower: With 150 bottles of wine valued from \$12 to \$100

1 Exquisite Diamond Necklace: Donated by Hight & Randall LTD; congratulations diamond raffle winner Jan Martin!

3 Beautiful Flower Arrangements: Designed with orchids provided by Lejardin European Floral

DIRECTIONS: Set the timer for October 7, 2011. Gather dedicated Committee, Staff and Volunteers to mix all of the ingredients at the Marriott Hotel for 350 Guests. Bake for 4 hours in an atmosphere filled with a true sense of community and generosity. Sprinkle with comments by Emcee KTTC TV announcer Tom Overly and Gift of Life Director Vicki Allen. Create the 7th successful “A Taste for Life” Event!



Memorials

This list reflects gifts given in Memory or in Honor of Donors and Recipients during the month of August 2011. We thank everyone who took part in this Special Tribute Opportunity and apologize for any names we may have missed.

Brent Anderson <i>Karla Anderson-Hemmann</i>	Christina "Tina" Dallas <i>Charter Bank, Eau Claire WI</i>	Keith Henning <i>Susan Henning</i>
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TRANSPLANT HOUSE
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The mission of Gift of Life Transplant House is to provide transplant patients and their caregivers with high quality, affordable accommodations in a supportive, home-like environment.



GIFT OF LIFE TRANSPLANT HOUSE
705 Second Street, Southwest
Rochester, Minnesota 55902

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2011 Halloween Party!



Patients and caregivers



Elvis performs!



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