

March 4, 2010

Good news!

The US Homeland Security has approved Sergio's 6 month visa extension.

Thank you Lord. Praise the Lord.

Last week, Sergio was fitted for foot braces. He is managing to take greater strides in his attempt to walk.

In other news, the local boys hockey league in our area is having a fund raiser for Sergio. Boys 10-12 years old are selling tickets called Skaters for Sergio. Attached is the article from the local hometown newspaper.

Sergio has turned so many hearts with his beautiful disposition and his smile.

God bless you and the children at the Hogar.

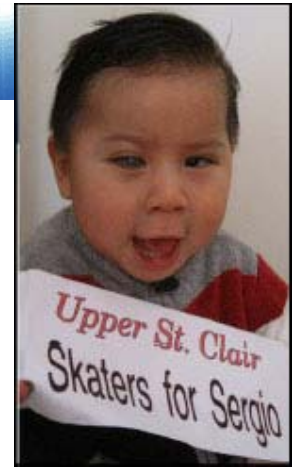
Unworthy as I am,

Cynthia

Praise Him with the harp and zither, everything that breathes Praise the Lord.



March 3, 2010



USC skates for Sergio

By Terri T. Johnson Almanac staff writer tjohnson@thealmanac.net

The world is, indeed, diverse.

The roller hockey team from Streams Middle School in the Upper St. Clair School District has taken a small Guatemalan boy with a Russian name being nurtured by members of a Mt. Lebanon Greek church, under their wing.

Eighteen-month-old Sergio Valaam is being cared for by Cynthia Raftis and other members of the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church after being abandoned in a basket a day after his birth. He was left on the doorstep of an orthodox church orphanage in Guatemala in early August 2008. The nuns named him Sergio because he was abandoned on St. Sergio Day. Valaam, a Russian monastery, became his last name.

For four months he stayed in a crib, an undiagnosed growth on his right eye. Then Raftis, of Mt. Lebanon, and fellow church member Demetria Pappas arrived on a mission trip and fell in love with the little boy without a family.

The medical condition with his eye led to Sergio coming to the Pittsburgh area for treatment. More than a year later, he remains in Raftis' care, surrounded by doctors, therapists and a whole lot of love. His medical visa expired in January and, through pro bono legal service, an extension is in the works. Several times a week, therapists - vision, physical, speech, developmental and occupational - visit Sergio. He needs foot braces and another corneal transplant. All of this costs money. That's where the USC Roller Hockey team and student Barrett Wyland come in. Sergio's medical fund was selected as the team's community service project. Wyland, a USC student, member of the roller hockey team and participant in the district's International Baccalaureate program, and Caroline Barrett Wyland, Sergio's speech therapist and Barrett Wyland's mother, started Skate for Sergio, along with team coach Gary Paul. Skate for Sergio is part of Wyland's service goals for the IB program.

The team is selling tickets for \$2 for a chance to win two tickets to a Pittsburgh Penguins hockey game. Call Caroline Barrett Wyland at 412-628-2225 for tickets. The winner will be drawn March 9 and will be notified by phone.

All proceeds will go to the Sergio Valaam Fund, Holy Cross Philopochos, 23 Gilkeson Road, Mt. Lebanon, PA 15228.

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Holy Trinity, Ambridge

Cleveland Clinic

Sergio's Therapists

Sergio's Story

written by Cynthia Raftis

Sergio weighs 25 pounds and measures 31 inches from the last visit to Dr. Tatiana Zeballos who provides pediatric service at no charge. In January we filed for a renewal of his visa. Cohen Law provided the legal service pro-bono. We are waiting for the response for his six month extension. Sergio was examined under anesthesia on Feb.1st. The ophthalmologist at Cleveland Clinic said his eyes are stable and the pressure was good. Sergio is in need of foot braces. Michael Serenari, CO, is making two braces to correct Sergio's feet. He was kind enough to get the manufacturer to discount the braces to less than half price. Sergio has 11 therapy sessions each week. Twice a week a vision therapist, occupational therapist, speech therapist and physical therapist visits his home for a one hour session. In addition, once a week a developmental therapist works with Sergio. In January the Children's Agape Foundation of Washington DC/Baltimore made a large contribution to Sergio's medical bills which were paid directly to Children's Hospital. A young parishioner, 8 year old Dimitrios Niaros, from the Holy Trinity Church in Ambridge chose The Sergio Valaam Fund to be the recipient of the "St. Nicholas Christmas Stocking Charity" this year. We attended services in Ambridge in February to receive the donation. Sergio is thriving and he is a happy baby. He loves the homemade baby food, especially broccoli. He plans to spend Easter in Palm Beach, FL.

