Charity
Starts at Home
St. Louis-based Wings of Hope provides miracles worldwide
By Jim Nicholson

Imagine your child has a life-threatening deformity. No, deformity is too simple. Make that deformities, decidedly in the plural, and that her life, per se, has been reduced to existence in a wheelchair, but not a normal wheelchair, a horizontal wheelchair. How does one care for a child in a horizontal wheelchair? Well, for starters, it's a 24/7 job, which means, as a single mother, you have no other job. Your income equates to welfare, which certainly does not begin to compensate you for the hours you put in. Your medical bills are more than stratospheric and, because you have no medical insurance as you can neither afford it and, even if you could, no insurance company would grant it, you're reduced to the waits beyond belief of Emergency Room treatment. Your child, who could and should be a happy, pretty girl, is friendless, in constant pain and, well, even good girls act up after a few hours of staring at an Emergency Room ceiling.

Or imagine you're the Chief of a tribe of Indians deep in the heart of the Amazon. 'Civilization' has long ago wiped out your own civilization and continues to encroach upon your hunting and farming lands. Your tribe has retreated into the jungle and themselves about as far as they can go and the push of contemporary life has met the shov...
of life, as you’ve always known it. The entire tribe is in desperate need of
some form of miracle merely to maintain its existence, but what? Some tribal
visionary—a young man who should be a hunter? An old woman who’s seen
it all? Anyway, someone who’s capable of verbalizing thoughts new to the tribe
has noted that the tribe has always
known how to make brooms and, for all
they know, they make the best brooms
in the Amazon. But how does knowing
how to make brooms equate to making
brooms for a living? How does the tribe
market its brooms and, in essence,
become a broom-based capitalism?

Both stories are true and Wings of
Hope, the St. Louis-based volunteer
charity, provided the miracles necessary
to give each a truly happy ending. The
little girl was flown from her home to a
hospital, which provided the series of
operations she needed, but her mother
could not afford—all arranged for by
the Wings of Hope Medical Relief and
Air Transport (MAT). Instead of being
confined to that prison of a horizontal
wheelchair, she’s now on her feet and
playing. The Amazonians, meanwhile,
have been given that facilitating step
they needed towards self-sufficiency.
Welcome to just another day at the
Wings of Hope office.

Executive Director Douglas Clements,
explains that “Wings of Hope sees itself
as delivering humanity” then clarifies
the phrase by saying Wings of Hope
delivers hope by providing healthcare,
access to healthcare, education,
opportunities for education, business
opportunities and micro-loan programs.” The
list could go on as this is obviously an
organization that facilitates between
need and opportunity rather than one
that makes promises it cannot keep or,
possibly worse, expects the vagaries
of life across the planet to conform to
some kind of institutional rule book.

In referring to the Amazonians,
Clements points out that the “mental
evolution” inherent in making the
decision to control their future through the
services the medical community gives to
Wings of Hope patients. Sometimes,
those patients provide both the organi-
zation and the medical community with
truly memorable challenges.

An international case in point is the
story of a 10-year-old Somali girl who
had been abducted as a sex slave. After
three years of captivity and more sexual
abuse than one cares to contemplate,
she was rendered useless to her captors

(“she was so deformed, she no longer
had bodily functions,” Clements relates)
and abandoned to die. Instead, she was
found by a caravan and, ultimately,
returned to her parents. Wings of Hope
was contacted, “She needed all of her
lower abdomen and her gynecological
equipment rebuilt. As she had no pass-
port, getting her here was a huge prob-
lem. Colin Powell (a member of Wings
of Hope’s Honorary Council) stepped in
and got her a passport. We flew her over
in one of our airplanes.” The Mayo Clinic
provided what turned out to be
two years of treatment.

Clements believes “charities should
prove they deserve to receive money”. With Wings of Hope, the proof stretch-
es across the planet. Discussions are in
process to ensure the success stories
continue. “Negotiations are underway
with a major St. Louis corporation for
them to fund the Saint Louis Medical
Relief and Air Transport service in a
manner that requires them to spend
zero initial capital,” Clements offers.
“Wings would be required to validate
our worth each year and we welcome
that opportunity.” What a nice way to
deliver humanity.