



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JIM AVEDEKIAN

'An Afternoon in Africa'

AIDS clinic fund-raiser seeks to bring awareness home to Pasadena

By Carl Kozlowski

Ever since Jim Avedikian started Phoenix Pharmacy in 1986, he has been on the front lines of the battle against HIV and AIDS in the San Gabriel Valley. But for the past 10 years, he has also been part of the battle against the modern era's worst plague right at its epicenter: the heart of Africa.

As a major supporter of Huntington Hospital's Phil Simon Clinic, which provides educational programs, medical care and referral services for patients living with HIV and AIDS, he has traveled across the planet as part of the clinic's Tanzania Project. Led by the Simon Clinic's lead physician, Dr. Kimberly Sharner, the project assists a combination of Tanzanian governmental and private health care facilities in the city of Arusha, which are making major

inroads into combating the epidemic.

This Sunday Avedikian will be the host of "An Afternoon in Africa: Children Helping Children," the second annual fund-raiser for the Tanzania Project. Following the success of last year's initial event, which raised more than \$40,000 for the cause, he is returning to Pasadena's famed Castle Green for another day of music, art auctions, great food and elaborate backdrops designed to make the Castle's lawn look like Africa itself.

"Last year's event was totally amazing. It was almost a complete sellout, and it was our first event for the project," says Avedikian. "We sold out all the art for the event, and there was a lot of enthusiasm from the people there. By the time the Gay Men's Chorus was finished, there wasn't a dry eye in the house. Netting \$30,000 is really

powerful for the situation."

Considering that Tanzania is a nation where the per capita income is \$300 per year and a new kitchen can be built for \$250, the \$40,000 raised had a far more significant impact than it would have had in America. And this year's event is even more ambitious, as the efforts of Avedikian and his Phil Simon Clinic cohorts have resulted some powerful and somewhat unexpected alliances.

"We got the fifth-grade class of Holy Family Catholic School in South Pasadena involved, and they created bronze sculptures of animals under the tutelage of Louis Longi, who's the sculptor for Cirque du Soleil and has sold his work around the world," explains Avedikian. "He donated his time and materials to cast these things in bronze from the kids' wax sculptures and also donated a six-

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foot-high statue of a Masai [tribe] warrior that will be auctioned off."

The Holy Family class became involved after Shriner made a presentation at the school, particularly affecting the students by telling them about the countless children left orphaned by the disease and showing them footage of a Christian orphanage that has helped many children rebuild their lives. She also highlighted videos of exotic animals that she, Avedikian and their team of supporters encountered while embarked on safaris.

"The students got very enthused and made a paper prayer chain with greetings to the kids in the orphanage for us to take over there. The children at the Compassion International orphanage made a prayer chain to send back to them," says Avedikian. "Now there's a relationship between the children at these schools which will greatly enhance the understanding of what each child's life is like by this kind of hand-held relationship."

Additionally, the fund-raising team asked students at the Creative Planet School of the Arts in Baldwin Park to perform at the upcoming fund-raiser, and they learned Tanzanian dances and how to sing in Swahili, the primary language of its populace. The students will stage a 20-minute performance, while smaller groups of children will wander throughout the event performing smaller-scale entertainment.

Meanwhile, a silent auction will offer the Holy Family students' sculptures in addition to African artworks, gift cards and greeting cards, while life-size papier-mâché animals will make the grounds look like safari turf. All this attention has made Avedikian optimistic that the number of attendees will outgrow the Castle Green's facilities by the time of next year's event, which is a good problem to have.



HOPEFUL: Jim Avedikian brings cheer to an African child.



PROGRESS: Dr. Kimberly Shriner says her fourth trip to Africa has been the most optimistic.

It's also not the only sign of hope for Shriner.

"This year's Africa trip was our fourth and our most optimistic because the Tanzanian government is finally issuing anti-retroviral therapy for designated treatment centers, and we've been able to link up with those centers and provide clinical and educational support and will continue to

do that in the future," says Shriner. "So this has really brought a ray of hope to an area that has been devastated by HIV and AIDS, though there are 1,500 people in the Arucha area who are getting the treatment, and two million there need it. It's pretty limited, but it's something that has good results with the patients involved returning to work, gaining weight and providing for their families."

Among the Phil Simon Clinic's future goals is to build on scientific and political efforts that have converged to fight HIV globally and to provide scholarships for medical workers to attend medical school and become permanently entrenched doctors in the beleaguered nation. And Avedikian notes that he finds hope that the behavioral risks which have been a key cause of the spread of AIDS are also finally changing.

"Because drugs are available now, people are going to get tested. Before their response was 'why go get tested, because you can't do anything for me,'" says Avedikian. "Now they are starting to get tested and get information about preventing infection by safer sex practices. The real lesson in all this is that you can reach across the ocean and help others because really we are all one." □

"An Afternoon in Africa: Children Helping Children" will take place from 1:30 to 5 p.m. Sunday at the Castle Green, 99 S. Raymond Ave., Pasadena. Call (626) 397-5480.