

Luncheon sets sites on medically fragile children

By Pasha Carroll
Neighbor Newspapers Staff Writer

They don't work for money. They volunteer to restore the sparkle in a broken child's eyes, to watch them grow and help their minds expand.

"I fell in love with a little guy that was adopted," said Laura Smith, a My House volunteer since 2001.

The child needed a liver when she visited him at the hospital. When he received a transplant and moved to My House for care, their relationship became even stronger.

"He turned into an amazing little guy," Ms. Smith said. "It is like watching a child of your own grow up."

Each day, people from the pool of 350 volunteers go to My House, where they cradle babies, read to children or do simple domestic tasks. The volunteers come in all ages, families volunteer together, school children even help clean the bathrooms, founder and Executive Director, Donna Carson said.

Some of the volunteers become so attached to the children at My House, they adopt them.

"Eighty percent end up going to adoptive homes," Ms. Carson said.

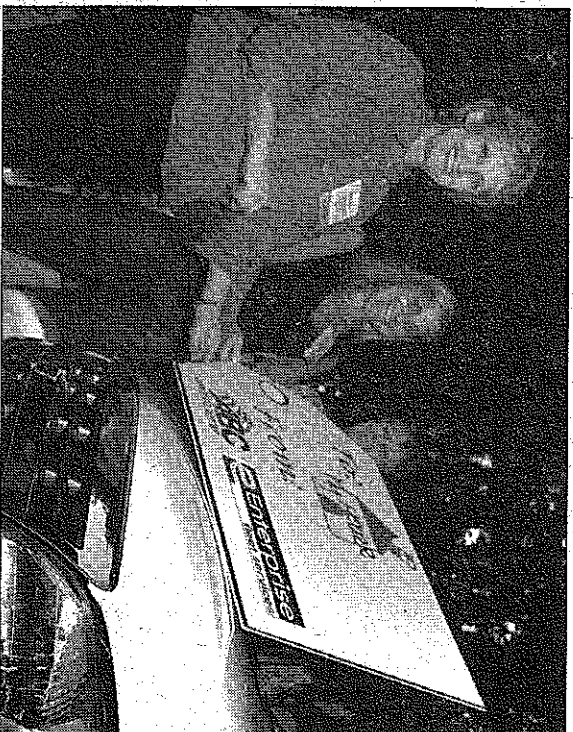
My House is a rented house in midtown, opened by Ms. Carson in June 1999, that fills a niche that it seemed charities had forgotten.

My House helps 12 "boarder babies" children who had special medical problems at birth, at a time. The kids, up to 4-years-old, are medically fragile, abused or neglected, and have no where to go when they leave the hospital.

"Originally we thought it would just be newborns," Ms. Carson said. "But we've continued to take older children."

Carson was a social worker at Grady Hospital who yearned to help the boarder babies who had nowhere to go. The babies, some born from drug-addicted mothers, others shaken and abused, some with medical conditions or parents who were unable to provide care, are all candidates to stay at My House. Children stay as long as they need to, a couple days or months.

Ms. Carson remembers one child, who was burned from a



Nathan Self/Staff

Donna Carson, executive director and founder of My House, a home for "Boarder Babies," stands with volunteers. From left to right is Jill Harris and Sharon Destefano in front of a donated van full of donated food.

bathub of scalding water and needed skin grafting from the neck down. She remembers another who came to My House in a full body cast from being beaten by a parent.

But the flipside to seeing all the pain, Ms. Carson said, is watching a child transition through the volunteer's and staff's love and care.

"Kids who weren't supposed to be severely retarded, end up thriving," Ms. Carson said.

She even remembers a child with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome that is now in a gifted class.

To continue the mission, Ms. Carson is searching for a 5-acre lot to build a new home that can take in 20 children, she dreams of green space,

where older children can run.

"It is a wonderful place, and we have to turn away so many kids," Ms. Carson said.

HomeAid Atlanta is committed to building a home once they find the land. But the criteria are rigid, accessibility to Scottish Rite Hospital, zoned agricultural or commercial, a place where neighbors would accept a "shelter" and a location that volunteers can get to.

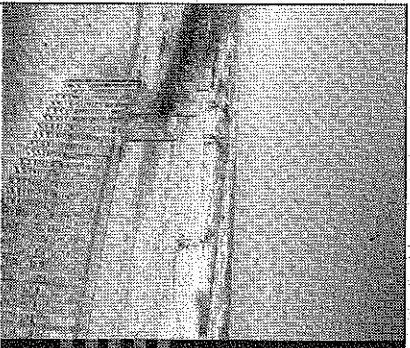
Ms. Carson said she will continue to search. She had hoped to have a secured location before the 7th Annual My House Luncheon; it would have been uplifting news to announce, she said.

It is events like the Luncheon, hosted by Vikki Locke

that makes My House a reality. The event will be Nov. 2 at Maggiano's Little Italy in Buckhead. The silent auction opens at 11 a.m. and the program and lunch is from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

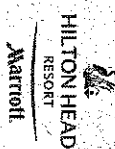
Recently Associated Builders and Contractors of Georgia donated a 2005 Chevrolet Venture van to My House, so the children would have a vehicle to go to the hospital in. The van came filled with food.

"The heart of this organization is the love and volunteers," Ms. Carson said.



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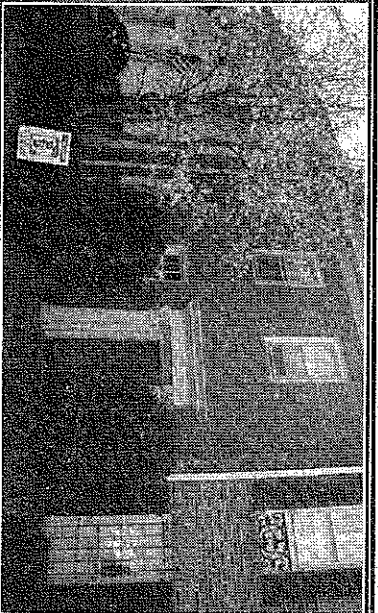
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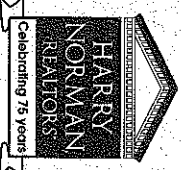


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