

Generosity brings Jamaican boy to Mass. for heart surgery



By Jennifer Lord/Daily News staff
GHS
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FRAMINGHAM -

Immanuel Morgan came into the world too early, and doctors at first blamed his slow growth on his prematurity.

When he was just 2 months old, his parents, Janet and Calvin, were told the problem was a little more serious: Imanuel had a hole in his heart and an extra large vessel, a correctable defect with a \$100,000 price tag. The Morgans, who have seven children and live in Jamaica, worried they would never be able to afford the surgery for their youngest child.

"I started to look for help, someone who could help Imanuel," Janet Morgan said. "It took a long time, but now I'm here."

"Here" is the home of Richard and Ardis Manelis, 1,720 miles from the Caribbean island but just a half hour away from Massachusetts General Hospital, where Imanuel will undergo surgery Thursday. The 15-month-old's medical care is being sponsored by the Framingham Rotary through Gift of Life New England, a Rotary project that has saved over 44 children from 22 countries since 2000.

Yesterday Imanuel tested the boundaries of the Manelis' child-proofing, toddling about the kitchen with wide eyes, inquiring fingers and the occasional sneeze. Doctors had hoped his heart defect could be fixed with a simple catheterization, but the hole proved to be too large.

"At first, when we just came, he was crying and nervous, like he wants to go back, but now he's more comfortable," Morgan said. "It's a little different for him here, but everyone has been nice."

Gift of Life was started 31 years ago by a Long Island Rotary chapter and has been responsible for about 10,000 children's heart surgeries around the world. While the Boston area is internationally known for its medical care, the New England program didn't come on line until 2000, said Ted Shaughnessy, vice president for Gift of Life New England.

"They've got everybody in the world wanting to come here to get care," Shaughnessy said. "It wasn't

easy at first, but we're pretty established now."

Immanuel was referred to the program by Dr. William Foster, a cardiologist in Kingston, Jamaica, who frequently places children with Gift of Life. Morgan was thrilled to discover her son qualified for the program.

"He's getting taller, but he's not getting fat," Morgan said. "He only weighs 16 pounds, but he's over 28 inches long."

Noted Ardis Manelis, "All his energy is going to deal with his problem, not to put on weight."

Morgan proudly leafed through photographs of her children, the oldest of whom is 25. Her husband, a butcher, remained behind to care for the children who still live at home. Immanuel, recognizing a sibling, happily grabbed a photo from her hand and pressed it to his face.

"The fact that she got to come here, she persevered, she was able to get her son the medical care he needed - it's really amazing," Ardis Manelis said.

While the Morgans are being hosted by the Manelises, other Rotary members are chipping in with meals and baby equipment for Immanuel. Mother and child will be visiting Monday's Rotary meeting to thank members for their efforts.

Sponsorship costs \$5,000, which covers travel and some medical expenses. The Framingham Rotary previously sponsored a child in 2004, when 10-year-old Ebony Richards visited the area from Antigua for a similar operation.

"It's been a great experience for us, getting to help these children," Richard Manelis said.

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