

Rotary Minute

By Diana Schoberg

Ricardo Román was shopping with his wife at a department store in Chile in 2012 when a woman in her early 20s approached him. He didn't recognize her, he confesses through an interpreter, but there were two good reasons: He had last seen her more than a decade earlier ? and her smile had changed drastically. Román, a member of the Rotary Club of Reñaca, Chile, is the national coordinator of a program that has helped thousands of children in Chile with cleft lips, cleft palates, and other birth defects ? including this stranger who now wanted to give Román a hug. ?She told me, ?This is my Rotarian smile,? he recalls, his voice full of emotion. ?It was a very gratifying moment.?

The project got its start in 1993 when San Francisco (California) Rotarians, sponsored a medical mission that performed reconstructive surgeries in Chile. That was the beginning of Rotaplast, a program that evolved into a nonprofit organization that has since sent teams to 26 countries.

More than 250 potential patients lined up from all over Chile to have the operation completed by a team of skilled surgeons donating their time and skills. Using four operating rooms ? one for cleft lip or palate, one for ear reconstruction, one for breast reconstruction, and one for other issues ? the team got to work. Patients were chosen based on need and on the complexity of the surgery. By the end of their stay, the surgeons and their staff had operated on 82 patients.

This is but one of the many projects that Rotary is involved in internationally that helps improve the lives of women and children abroad. There are many more way to get involved in Rotary and potentially donate your time and skills on a project either here in Caledon or abroad. To find out more, check us out at www.rotaryclubofpalgrave.com and read more stories like this at Rotary.org.