



Overview of Efforts to Support the Gashi Children from Kosova May 20, 2007

Summary: We kindly ask your attention toward Ardit, Arian, Ariola, Milot, and Gonxhe Gashi, who arrived in Boston on April 30th. They are five children from the village of Verboc in Kosova, who suffered various burns to their bodies and faces in a domestic accident on December 22, 2005.

As a community, we are faced with the task of housing these children and their mothers for many months over a period of several years while they receive treatment, and also providing financial support for their daily expenses. Towards this end, the Massachusetts Albanian American Society/BESA (MAAS/BESA -- <http://www.maasbesa.org/>) is coordinating fundraising efforts in support of the children, who are being treated at the Boston Shriners Hospital.

Below is a brief summary of the institutions involved and the support received so far for the children so that their situation is transparent and there is no confusion.

- 1) **The United States Military**, (more specifically, Sergeant Edward Vowell, from the Civil Affairs unit) coordinated and arranged for the children to be seen at the Boston Shriners Hospital. Over the past year, Sergeant Vowell worked in obtaining the travel documents for the children and the two mothers accompanying them. Upon receipt of an official letter of support from MAAS/BESA, he also arranged the interviews with the US Embassy in Skopje Macedonia, and eventually obtained their visas.
- 2) **The Government of Kosova (Ministry of Health)** covered the cost of the initial round trip airline tickets to Boston.
- 3) **The Boston Shriners Hospital** (<http://www.shrinershq.org/Hospitals/Boston/>) specializes in the treatment of burns in pediatric patients, and is one of the foremost institutions in the world in this field. The Shriners Hospital has agreed to accept the case of the Gashi children on a pro bono basis so there will be no charge for any of the medical services. The children had consultative visits on May 2nd and May 9th to establish a plan for future treatment. The decision has since been made that the children will undergo initial treatments of laser surgery and Z-plasty from May 21-July 16. It is likely they will need to remain Boston until the fall of 2007, and will also need to return multiple times after that for follow-up over a period of several years and several operations. As the official sponsor of the children, MAAS/BESA expects to receive a letter from the Shriners Hospital in the near future providing more details on the initial diagnosis and follow-up plans.
- 4) **Casa Monte Casino** in Boston's North End has agreed to house the families for a reasonable price. The facilities are clean, furnished, and with full facilities, in addition to being within walking distance of the hospital, public transportation, and downtown Boston. Discussions are currently underway with Casa Monte Casino to establish a possible long-term arrangement for the Gashi children. For more information, visit <http://www.casamontecassino.org/indexING.html>

5) **The Local Community** is seeking to raise money to pay for living expenses while the Gashi family is in Boston periodically over the next several years. All of the initial logistical assistance and advice were provided by the **Albanian American Woman's Organization/Motrat Qiriazhi** in New York (<http://www.aawomq.org/>), and **Children's Chance** in Connecticut (<http://www.thenewstoday.info/2006/02/06/dorita.urrata.a.lifetime.commitment.htm>) prior to the involvement of MAAS/BESA in Boston.

Since early March, MAAS/BESA took the lead role to provide the necessary documentation required by the US embassy so that the children and mothers could obtain their visas. MAAS/BESA has already covered the expenses for the first month of rent and living expenses for the family and will continue to do so throughout the children's stay in Boston with the necessary support of the local community. In addition, MAAS/BESA will apply for other forms of financial assistance, as necessary, in the future.

Now, MAAS/BESA in cooperation with the **Kosovar Albanian Society of Boston** and all other Albanian organizations and institutions in Boston, has initiated the effort to coordinate the fundraising events within the local community that will be necessary. To date, the **Holy Trinity Albanian Orthodox Church** and **St. George's Cathedral** have already pledged sizable donations from their Sunday collections. In addition, many individual donors have already stepped forward with donations (a full list of donors to date will be provided at the initial fundraiser on May 20th at Alba Bar and Grill in Quincy).

In addition, Leonard Keka owner of **Alba Bar and Grill**, and **Alba Trattoria in Quincy**, has generously offered to host a major fundraiser event on May 20th where all the proceeds will be donated to the Massachusetts Albanian Assistance Fund, for the benefit of the Gashi family. This is an extremely generous gesture on the part of Mr. Keka and we hope that his generosity will be matched by Albanians and non-Albanians alike.

6) **Suela Lika**, who works at Massachusetts General Hospital in the Bone Marrow Transplant Department, has proven to be an invaluable asset, and has volunteered to coordinate and oversee the visit of the Gashi family in Boston, and to liaise with the Boston Shriners Hospital, as necessary. She is responsible for meeting with hospital doctors and officials, serving as an interpreter, assisting the family with their daily needs, and serving as a liaison to the community for the children and family in regards to organizing activities.

To join and help with this effort , please direct your contribution to:

**Massachusetts Albanian American Society
PO Box 960346
Boston MA 02196**

Please note "Assistance Fund" on the Memo Line

Alternately, you may use a credit card through paypal to donate online at <http://www.maasbesa.org>

You may also make your contributions in your local church and/or plan to attend the fundraiser event at Alba Restaurant on May 20 for which a flyer is being distributed.