

# LEADERS IN care

STORIES OF THE MOST AMAZING CARE ANYWHERE

FALL 2025



## Relentless Hope

International Patient Ambassadors share messages  
of hope, resilience and leadership



**Shriners**  
Children's™





### OUR MISSION

At Shriners Children's™, our three-part mission has one goal: to change and improve lives. We do this by caring for our patients, conducting research to gain knowledge and develop new treatments, and providing educational opportunities for physicians and other healthcare professionals.



### WHO DO WE TREAT?

Children under age 18 may receive care and treatment when there is a reasonable possibility they could benefit from the specialized services we offer. All services are provided regardless of a family's ability to pay or insurance status.



### WHAT ARE OUR PEDIATRIC SPECIALTIES?

- + Treatment for orthopedic conditions
- + Burn care
- + Spinal cord injury rehabilitation and management
- + Cleft lip and palate care



### GROUNDBREAKING RESEARCH

We strive to discover answers that will one day improve lives. Our innovative researchers have made significant breakthroughs in all four of our service lines, improving patient care and adding to the global body of medical knowledge.



### CONTINUING EDUCATION

One way we help improve the lives of children worldwide is by offering educational opportunities to medical professionals. We maintain relationships with several medical teaching facilities, and our clinicians are known for sharing their experience and knowledge with other medical communities.



### THE SHRINERS FRATERNITY

Shriners International, a fraternity based on fun, fellowship and the Masonic principles of brotherly love, relief and truth, founded Shriners Children's as its official philanthropy in 1922. What began as one hospital is now a world-renowned healthcare system with locations in three countries. The fraternity, which has approximately 200 chapters in several countries and thousands of clubs around the world, continues to support this unique healthcare system. To learn more, please visit [shrinersinternational.org](https://shrinersinternational.org).

Dear Readers,



As the leaves turn and we settle into the rhythms of a new school year, I am looking forward to this season of change and inspiration. Fall is a time for new beginnings, and – if you're anything like me – a chance to reflect on why we do what we do.

Here at Shriners Children's, our mission is to help children unlock their potential, as you'll see in this issue of *Leaders in Care*. You'll meet young patients like Milli, Tommy and Nathanael, whose courage and resilience after receiving burn injuries will lift your spirits (page 9). Check out the incredible impact our physicians have on our patients' lives (page 5) and meet our International Patient Ambassadors (page 15), who remind us that hope knows no borders.

Across our healthcare system, care is provided by clinicians with compassion and expertise. No one exemplifies this more than our Chief Medical Officer, Fran Farley, M.D., who recently received the Distinguished Achievement Award from the Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America. We are thrilled to see Dr. Farley recognized for her dedication to children's health (page 4). This recognition reflects the values and standards that continue to guide our work across the system – helping children pursue brighter, more hopeful futures.

I hope you find these stories as inspiring as I do. Thank you for being part of this journey with us.

Sincerely,  
Mel Bower  
Chief Marketing and Communications Officer,  
Shriners Children's

## PATIENT PERSPECTIVES

A grateful parent shared this heartfelt note with the team at Shriners Children's Salt Lake City, echoing a sentiment we hear often – that our staff feels like family.



BECAUSE OF YOU WE FEEL LOVE. YOU ARE FAMILY!  
I AM A SHRINERS PARENT.  
MY CHILD ALWAYS ENJOYS HIS VISITS TO SHRINERS HOSPITAL.  
HE SAYS "MOM, I LOVE THIS PLACE!"

FALL 2025

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 **VISIT US ONLINE** to find more stories like these at [myleadersincare.com](https://myleadersincare.com).

**ON THE COVER:** Our 2025–2026 International Patient Ambassadors, Brandon and Carlota, refuse to be held back by anything.



# Prestigious Honors Recognize Shriners Children's Expertise

The compassion, experience and expertise of our medical team are what set Shriners Children's apart from other pediatric healthcare systems. We are proud to share that two Shriners Children's employees were recently honored by the Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America.

Chief Medical Officer Frances A. Farley, M.D., received the Distinguished Achievement Award for her work in pediatric orthopedics, unwavering dedication to improving the lives of children and exemplary leadership within the medical community. It is one of the highest honors in pediatric orthopedics, recognizing individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the field over the course of their career through clinical care, education, research, leadership and service. As only the second woman so honored, Dr. Farley said the award carries special significance to her. "Throughout my career, I've made a point to mentor women," Dr. Farley said. "I'm looking forward to the future of pediatric orthopedics and seeing more women making a huge difference in the field."

In addition, orthopedic surgeon J. Eric Gordon, M.D., of Shriners Children's St. Louis, received the Humanitarian Award



*Dr. Frances Farley, above, and Dr. J. Eric Gordon, left, received awards from the Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America for their work with Shriners Children's.*

recognizing his work improving the lives of children throughout the Eastern Caribbean and beyond. Dr. Gordon's reputation is far-reaching, and he regularly receives inquiries from across the country seeking his advice and help with complex patient cases. Dr. Gordon himself was born with bilateral clubfoot and knows firsthand the importance of receiving specialized care.

 **TO LEARN MORE** about Dr. Gordon's humanitarian efforts, visit [bit.ly/ShrinersGordonAward](http://bit.ly/ShrinersGordonAward).

## 'Leaders in Care' Brings Home the Gold

The team behind *Leaders in Care* is dedicated to bringing you stories about the superstars of Shriners Children's – our inspiring patients and incredible healthcare providers. We're proud to share that the magazine recently received a Gold from the Healthcare Advertising Awards for our work on the Fall 2024 issue, featuring International Patient Ambassadors Paige and Grayson on the cover. The award places *Leaders in Care* among the top 10% of more than 4,300 entries. In addition, Shriners Children's video "Rewriting Destiny: The Stories of Paige and Grayson" won four Telly Awards, including one Silver and three Bronze. These prestigious awards truly honor Shriners Children's patients and everyone in our healthcare system, who work to bring hope and healing to children everywhere.





**expertise**  
& EXCELLENCE

SPECIALTY CARE FUELED BY INNOVATION & RESEARCH

# On a Mission to Heal

*Shriners Children's  
physicians combine  
innovation,  
compassion and  
expertise to achieve  
remarkable outcomes*

**T**here are certain words that echo through the halls of Shriners Children's hospitals and clinics.

"He is my hero."

"She saved my life."

"Thanks to my doctor, I'm living my dream."

For families facing a difficult medical diagnosis or injury, our physicians are more than healthcare providers – they're the lifelines behind every milestone, every breakthrough, every dream made possible. >>

*Dr. Branko Bojovic specializes in reconstructive surgery that helps young patients heal physically and emotionally.*





*Dr. Bojovic talks with patient Ben and his mom, Jessica, about following up after treatment.*



*Dr. Bojovic discusses surgery recovery with Juan Diego, who was burned at age 13.*

What sets Shriners Children’s physicians apart isn’t just advanced training or impressive credentials – it’s how they blend the most innovative treatments with a commitment to each child’s future. And they’re mentoring the next generation of doctors, conducting breakthrough research and developing new protocols that raise the standard of care worldwide.

### Restoring function and confidence

Branko Bojovic, M.D., chief of plastic, laser and reconstructive surgery at Shriners Children’s Boston, brings a world-class level of skill in craniofacial surgery, scar management and microsurgery, honed during a career that includes being one of the surgeons who performed the world’s most comprehensive facial transplantation to date.

As part of Dr. Bojovic’s medical training, he rotated at Shriners Children’s Boston, where he learned essential plastic surgery techniques, including methods that employ laser technology. “The laser therapeutic options are cutting-edge. Our approach is unique in that surgeons, not dermatologists, offer those treatments to accompany their surgical techniques.”

One young patient, Juan Diego, came to Shriners Children’s Boston after surviving an electrical accident that severely damaged both his hands. But after a series of advanced reconstructive procedures – including microsurgery and laser therapy, and eventually a prosthesis, Juan Diego regained sensation and mobility.

“Technically, I’m not supposed to be alive. I’m not supposed to have hands,” said Juan Diego. “I know that if I hadn’t come to Shriners Children’s, I wouldn’t have the same functionality. They gave my hands back to me.”



*Dr. Mitchell Bernstein oversees the next generation of medical residents at Shriners Hospitals for Children Canada.*

Dr. Bojovic credits Shriners Children’s mission with making that level of care possible. “Our ability to treat patients without concern for their family’s ability to pay has always been a distinguishing feature that is so special,” he said. “That is truly remarkable and life-changing for many families.”

### Training the next generation of specialists

At the heart of the Shriners Children’s mission is a deep commitment to education. Mitchell Bernstein, M.D., pediatric orthopedic surgeon at the Shriners Children’s hospital in Montreal and Residency Program Director at McGill University, is one of the key figures driving this commitment forward.

“Shriners Hospitals for Children Canada is not just one of our teaching sites – it’s the academic hub of the residency program,” said Dr. Bernstein. Residents from McGill’s orthopedic program gather weekly in the hospital’s state-of-the-art simulation center, where they practice highly complex procedures without the pressure of being in an operating room. “It’s one of the best ways to accelerate learning while keeping patient safety at the forefront,” he explained.

Dr. Bernstein is confident that surgical education will continue to evolve, noting that simulation, virtual reality and data-driven coaching are already reshaping the way they teach.

“We’ve built an environment where residents not only see the full range of pediatric orthopedics but also work closely with our allied healthcare teams – therapists, nurse practitioners, psychologists and more,” said Dr. Bernstein. “At the core, it’s about developing healthy, effective physicians who can lead in their communities. That’s what we’re trying to do here every day.”



## A surgeon's Kentucky homecoming

On a busy afternoon on the third floor of Shriners Children's Lexington, Anne Marie Dumaine, M.D., moved between exam rooms, offering encouragement, high-fives and laughter to her young patients. One teen beamed as she proudly showed Dr. Dumaine her Taylor Swift T-shirt – a moment that the doctor celebrated with a big smile and genuine excitement.

It's small moments like these that set the tone for Dr. Dumaine's approachable and compassionate patient care – and builds trust in her role as the newest pediatric orthopedic surgeon on staff at Shriners Children's Lexington.

A Kentucky native, Dr. Dumaine completed medical school, surgical residency and a pediatric orthopedic fellowship in various parts of the country. Now, she's proud to return home and serve families across the region.

Dr. Dumaine treats a wide range of orthopedic conditions, including clubfoot, hip dysplasia, traumatic injuries and neuromuscular conditions, such as cerebral palsy. She's especially passionate about collaborative care, working closely with specialists in the motion analysis lab and neuromuscular clinic to support each child's mobility, function and comfort.

"My goal is for every patient and family to feel heard, supported and empowered," she said. "I want them to know I'm truly invested in their journey."

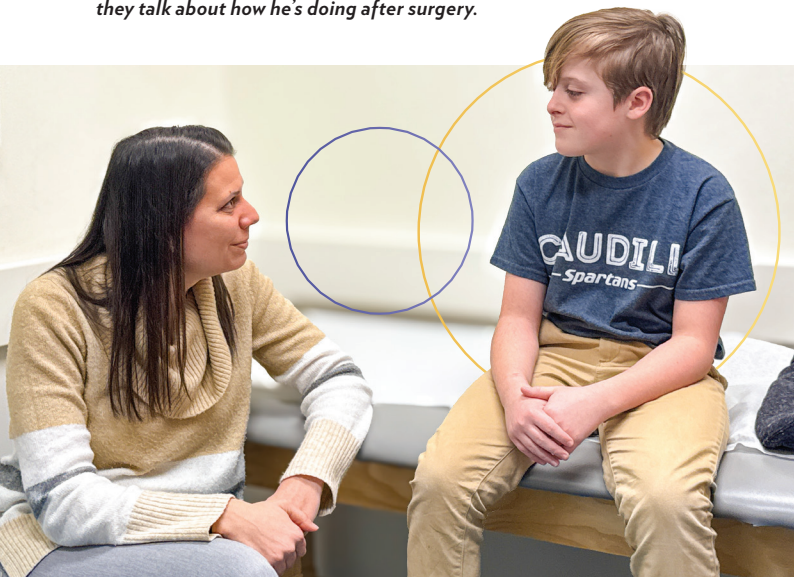
Dr. Dumaine's warm style and strong communication skills have already made a lasting impression on patients and families.

"She's the best doctor we have ever seen," said one family. "We would recommend her to anyone."

## Excellence that inspires confidence

At every Shriners Children's location, our doctors lead with expertise, but they heal with heart. When parents ask why they should trust Shriners Children's, the answer is simple – because our doctors make the impossible, possible. 🧠

*Dr. Dumaine focuses her full attention on Hayden as they talk about how he's doing after surgery.*



## Virtual Reality, Real Impact

*Expo showcases the future of care at Shriners Hospitals for Children Canada*

Last spring, Shriners Hospitals for Children Canada hosted the 2025 Virtual Reality Expo. The event brought together researchers, academics and healthcare professionals to explore the growing role of virtual reality (VR) in clinical care – from reducing preoperative anxiety to supporting rehabilitation, mental health and education.

Attendees visited a dozen booths featuring VR software already in use or soon to be launched in clinical settings.

Alexander Moreno, Ph.D., neuropsychologist at the Research Centre of the Institut universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal, presented VR tools developed by his lab. While his work focuses on older adults, the findings have important implications for pediatric patients. These nonpharmaceutical approaches to anxiety and pain management may benefit children undergoing complex treatments.

Eight-year-old Mia, who lives with osteogenesis imperfecta, shared her experience: "Before, I was scared to come to the hospital. I didn't like my treatment, but since I've been using the headset, I look forward to coming. I still feel the needle going into my arm, but just a little – it's much better," she said.

Event organizer and nurse scientist Argerie Tsimicalis emphasized the importance of collaboration: "We need to share our knowledge because we are listening to our patients, who want VR to be more deeply integrated into their care."

**LEARN MORE** about our rehabilitative services at [bit.ly/ShrinersPedRehab](https://bit.ly/ShrinersPedRehab).



# Bigger Is Better

*Transforming surgical education inside Hawai'i's largest operating rooms*

Shriners Children's has long been recognized as a leading provider of pediatric specialty care, but it is also committed to the education of current and future healthcare professionals. At Shriners Children's Hawai'i, many features, such as the state-of-the-art operating rooms, were intentionally designed to support this educational mission.

When Shriners Children's Hawai'i built its current operating room, it created the largest surgical suites on Oahu. That's just the way Shriners Children's does things. The ample space allows for surgical residents to come in and observe procedures, reflecting the system's broader commitment to advancing pediatric healthcare through education of the next cohort of clinicians.

Each year, visiting students, interns and healthcare professionals from institutions such as the University of Hawai'i's John A. Burns School of Medicine participate in mock or live surgeries. In real time, they gain invaluable experience under the mentorship of a Shriners Children's Hawai'i orthopedic surgeon.

"The ample space allows us to facilitate a safe and efficient environment for our surgical team members and learners," said Maria Ress, RN, surgical services manager. "It ensures that educational engagement does not compromise patient safety. We take pride in being a premier site for both surgical excellence and clinical engagement."

Compared to adult medicine, pediatrics tends to be resource-deprived, which discourages some medical school graduates from pursuing the field. But Shriners Children's is committed to pediatric subspecialty care – and to showing medical trainees just how rewarding and challenging this work can be.

Across the system, Shriners Children's has relationships with over 35 major educational institutions that cooperate to provide training opportunities and exposure to pediatric subspecialty care – especially in orthopedics – with an eye to generating interest in the field.



***"We take pride in being a premier site for both surgical excellence and clinical engagement."***

— MARIA RESS,  
SURGICAL SERVICES  
MANAGER

At Shriners Children's Northern California, for example, orthopedic surgery residents gather for the PediOrtho WEST conference – a rare opportunity to train in pediatric orthopedic procedures often missing from general programs.

## Learning each patient's needs

Beyond clinical and educational achievements, it's the compassion of the staff that truly defines the patient care experience. From anesthesiologists to orthopedic surgeons, every team member is committed to supporting the physical and emotional well-being of each patient.

Shriners Children's Hawai'i anesthesiologist Brandi Blair, M.D., and her team go above and beyond to ease patients' anxieties before surgery through personalized and creative interventions. "It's essential for kids to enter the operating room without fear," said Dr. Blair. "We tailor our approach to each child. One time, we had a potentially challenging developmentally delayed teen who was a big 'Star Wars' fan. So, we created a 'Star Wars' ambiance when he entered the OR, with the theme song playing and film clips displayed on the monitors. It's those small things that really improve the patient experience."

At all Shriners Children's facilities, surgical care is more than a procedure. It's an opportunity to create a learning environment with real-time mentorship that shapes the next generation of healthcare professionals and life-changing care for children. 🏠



# champions

IN HEALING

EMPOWERING PATIENTS, FAMILIES & CARE TEAMS

# Rebuilding Lives

Exceptional  
burn care that  
heals beyond the  
surface

*Milli formed close bonds with her entire care team – especially her physical therapists – when she was treated for burns at Shriners Children's Ohio.*

**A**t Shriners Children's, caregivers know that when a child is facing a serious medical diagnosis, it can be traumatic for the entire family. Parents and siblings need support. They need assistance. They need a strong shoulder to lean on. >>



That's why Shriners Children's provides wrap-around care that supports the whole family. Our hospitals and clinics are staffed with social workers and psychologists – and sometimes even therapy dogs – to help families cope. Many locations assist with places for families to stay nearby, so they can remain close during their child's stay.

But it is more than that. Our doctors, nurses and staff understand the distress families may feel during a hospital stay or clinic visit. They offer resources to help parents and patients cope with their fears and anxieties.

And then there are Shriners – dedicated volunteers who are generous, dependable and always stepping up. They transport patients, support families and quietly take care of the small things that make a big difference during tough times.

Nowhere is that kind of wrap-around support more evident than in the care of children recovering from burn injuries.

Patients with serious burns can be in the hospital for many months. Their recovery often stretches over many years as they return for laser and reconstructive treatments to improve scarring and mobility.

A burn injury doesn't just upend the life of the child – it turns the family's world upside down, too. Suddenly, they're navigating a world of white coats, exam rooms and unfamiliar medical language. Both patient and family need more than specialized treatment for the physical trauma – they also need compassion, guidance and emotional support every step of the way.

## Acceptance after all

Milli, 15, is a self-described thrill seeker. She's willing to ride daring roller coasters, watch scary movies and participate in anything that takes her out of her comfort zone. But Milli's most frightening experience was one she never expected.

In July 2024, Milli and her siblings were using a small tabletop fire pit to make s'mores. It was a windy day, so when someone added more fuel, the fumes blew into Milli and caught her clothing and hair on fire.

"I remember there was fire all around me," Milli recalled. "I didn't feel any pain at first, but my brothers told me to drop to the ground to smother the flames."

Robbie, Milli's dad, heard her screaming and rushed to her side. "It's hard to remember everything that happened, but I immediately drove her to the emergency room," Robbie said.

Milli was then transferred to Shriners Children's Ohio with second- and third-degree burns to her chest, arms, neck and face. "The morning after I got burned, I looked at myself in the mirror and didn't recognize myself," she said. "I was so red and blistered." Both Milli and Robbie worried about the long-term effects, both inside and out, this would have on her.

"I worried about how I would look for the rest of my life,"

Milli said. "Would people accept me with these scars?"

Part of the wrap-around care at Shriners Children's includes coping techniques to help patients not only accept but embrace their life as a burn survivor. "I had some really tough days with therapy and stretching, but the team always knew how to push me to move forward," said Milli.

"After she was discharged, I was worried about how her wound was healing," shared Robbie. "I called her team and they had me send photos of Milli's wounds. They reassured me that she was healing fine. It made me feel like even though I wasn't at the hospital, the team was still there supporting me." They knew how to help Milli's dad let go and trust.

"The nurses were the ones who really encouraged me to let Milli go back to school and not worry about what kids would say about her scars," Robbie said. "I'm glad I took their advice because she is so confident and social, despite everything she has gone through."

"The support they gave my dad allowed him to just be a dad and be there for me," added Milli. "The burn is something that happened to me, but it doesn't define me," she says. "My scars show strength and bravery and that's exactly how I want other burns survivors to feel," she said.



## A bit of humor helps

An impulsive climb changed

Nathanael's life forever. One summer day, the high schooler was looking for something fun to do. He decided to scale what he believed were telephone poles. "I was really bored," Nathanael said. "I had the not-so-bright idea to climb these poles, but they turned out to be power lines. I got zapped and fell."

The accident left Nathanael with electrical burns covering 45% of his body. He was taken to a hospital in Houston, then was transferred to Shriners Children's Texas in Galveston for specialized burn care. One of the first things he remembers after the accident is hearing the care team talk about amputating his left arm.

"I was in and out of consciousness, but I remember waking up to hear them say they were going to cut off my left arm," Nathanael said. "I just asked if they could take off my watch first."

That sense of humor has been one of Nathanael's greatest strengths. He relied on laughter, creativity and determination to face each new challenge. Previously left-handed, Nathanael had to relearn how to write, draw and do everyday tasks using his right hand. With help from his physical therapy team, he is making steady progress.

Nathanael's family was able to stay in the hospital much of the time he was there, an accommodation that was of great relief to Nathanael. It was not always easy for his mom and dad, however. The youngster was in pain and sometimes disoriented, particularly at night. Nurses Gene and Rick were always there to





*"Being a burn survivor has prepared me for life," Tommy said. "Thanks to Shriners Children's, I know I can do anything."*



***"It was a traumatic time, but being in such a supportive environment enabled us to transcend the trauma and recover."***

— MAGGIE, TOMMY'S MOM,

comfort Nathanael and reassure his parents. Nathanael's mother shared, "To see Nathanael's nurses so composed and competent was incredibly reassuring during this very stressful time."

### **The strength to hold on**

Amid a sea of caps and gowns, Tommy stood tall at his high school graduation. He had triumphed over unimaginable odds. Just months earlier, on a dark and rainy night, Tommy crashed his car and was trapped in his burning vehicle. Even though first responders had saved his life, his healing journey was just beginning.

For six weeks, Tommy was in a medically induced coma, and he woke up in the intensive care unit at Shriners Children's Northern California. His hands and legs were badly burned, needing surgery to save them. Tommy underwent more than 20 surgeries, including multiple skin grafts on his legs.

Ultimately his injuries resulted in him losing his right leg and fingertips.

Caregivers initially predicted that he would not walk for a year. But, with hard work and a carefully tailored rehabilitation plan guided by his physical therapists, just five months after the accident, Tommy walked with his high school classmates across the stage to receive his diploma.

"The wrap-around care, including medical care, physical and occupational therapy, and schooling, enabled our family to focus on helping Thomas and our own mental and psychological healing," said Tommy's mother, Maggie. "It was a traumatic time but being in such a supportive environment that cared about the whole family enabled us to transcend the trauma and recover."

### **Always there for the journey**

Another way Shriners Children's supports the whole family – and stands apart from other healthcare systems – is through its dedicated network of volunteers, who play a vital role in each patient and family's care journey. Volunteers are always >>



stepping in to help, whether through fundraising, transportation or simply being there when families need them most.

One powerful example is Ron Watt, a Shriner from Northern California, who recently drove more than 1,000 miles in a single day to ensure a young patient could get to her follow-up appointment. He left his home near Sacramento just after midnight, traveled to remote Modoc County to pick her up, then drove her five hours back to Shriners Children's Northern California.

After waiting three hours while she received care, he drove her home before eventually returning home almost 24 hours after he had left.

That's the spirit of Shriners Children's. At Shriners Children's, no one travels the journey alone. 🙋

🔗 **LEARN MORE** Shriners Children's provides dedicated burn care services. Visit <https://lead.me/BurnCareLocations> to explore options.

## Paving the way for a new life

With the help of our burn care specialists, children like Scarlett and Kaiden are healing and thriving after serious injuries.



*At Shriners Children's, everyone is dedicated to helping kids live their best lives.*



Scarlett was just 2 years old when she sustained burns to her feet after stepping into the ashes of an extinguished fire pit in her backyard. Her family had put on a backyard camping experience during the pandemic to spend more time outside. Scarlett's experiences at Shriners Children's Boston were so positive, she wants to know when she can go back for a return visit. Scarlett, now 7, loves dance and gymnastics.

Kaiden is back on the field playing baseball after sustaining a scald injury during a water game at summer camp. His family is grateful for the treatment Kaiden received at Shriners Children's Boston, and for the amazing medical team. "The doctor was fun, loving and truly cared," said Kaiden's mom, Ashley.



# From Halloween to Hearth: Stay Safe This Fall

As leaves fall and temperatures drop, the risks around the home change too. Shriners Children's is here to help your family enjoy the season safely, from trick-or-treating to cozy nights by the fire.

## Halloween Safety: Spooky and Safe

Keep your little ghouls protected on fright night.



Choose flame-resistant costumes that fit well and won't cause tripping.



Add reflective tape, glowsticks or light-up accessories to improve visibility.



Avoid masks that block vision – use face paint instead.



Use flashlights or battery-operated candles in jack-o'-lanterns.



Stick to well-lit neighborhoods and always trick-or-treat in groups with adult supervision.



Walk on sidewalks, cross at corners and stay alert for cars.



Keep your wrists, elbows and knees bent if falling. Do not try to break the fall with your hands or elbows.



## Take Care in the Kitchen This Thanksgiving

Serve up safety with every dish.

- Never leave food unattended – especially while frying or roasting a turkey.
- Keep children at least 3 feet from the stove or oven.
- Use back burners and turn pot handles inward to avoid spills.
- Always pour hot liquids away from your body.
- Avoid loose clothing near open flames or hot surfaces.
- Keep a lid or cookie sheet nearby to cover a pan if it catches fire.
- Always close the stove door when in use.

## Enjoy Cozy Nights Without the Burn Risks



Keep kids and pets 3 feet away from heaters and fireplaces.



Glass-fronted fireplaces can reach 172°F and can stay hot for over an hour after the fire is out. Place barriers and supervise children closely.



Choose heaters with tip-over protection and thermostats, and unplug units when leaving or sleeping.



Never place clothing or a blanket on a heater.



Have stoves and chimneys inspected annually.

# Gratitude and Grace

*Former patient reunites with the doctor who changed his life*

When Carter re-entered the doors at Shriners Children's St. Louis, he was no longer a little boy receiving pediatric orthopedic care. Now in his 30s, the husband, father and professional adaptive athlete returned "home" to thank his doctor.

The occasion? A reunion with his physician, Perry Schoenecker, M.D., the man who helped guide Carter and his family through many of their most challenging medical decisions.

Carter's care at Shriners Children's began when he was a toddler. Born with a rare and complex condition called proximal femoral focal deficiency, Carter's right leg was much shorter than his left. His parents turned to Shriners Children's for specialized orthopedic care.

Dr. Schoenecker worked closely with Carter's family to develop a personalized treatment plan. For the first few years of Carter's life, he wore a brace to make up for the length difference. However, the disparity grew too extensive. Carter's family faced a pivotal decision: attempt to lengthen the leg, or amputate his foot and add a prosthetic.

Conversations with other Shriners Children's families and thoughtful guidance from Dr. Schoenecker gave them the peace of mind to choose what was best for Carter's long-term mobility. In his case, this meant an amputation at age 4.

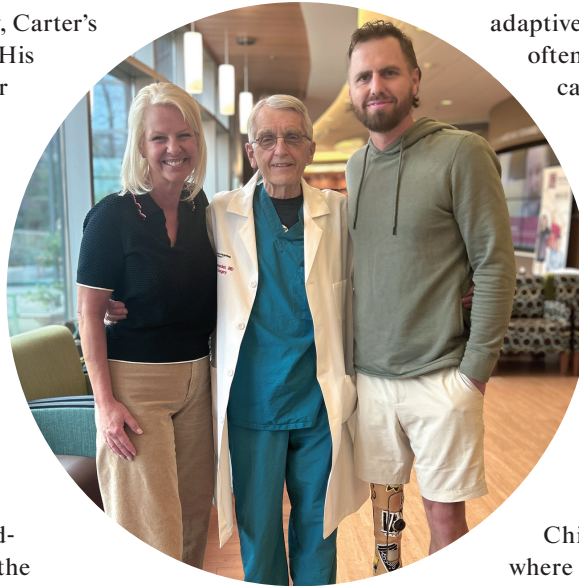
## A star athlete is born

As Carter grew, he excelled in sports. Even with a prosthetic, he became one of the best athletes in his high school. When traditional sports eventually grew more challenging, a chance

encounter led him to try wheelchair basketball, an adaptive sport that changed his life.

Carter earned a full-ride scholarship to play wheelchair basketball at the University of Missouri. He later joined Team USA, traveling the world and helping his team secure the gold medal in the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation men's tournament in Bogotá in 2013. However, his athletic evolution didn't stop there.

After a hiatus from sports, Carter discovered adaptive golf, a sport he now plays competitively, often with his wife, Laura, by his side as caddy. Together, they're raising two children and embracing a life full of drive, in every sense of the word.



*Carter and his mom, Beth, took time to revisit Shriners Children's St. Louis and Dr. Perry Schoenecker, the physician who guided Carter's care since he was a toddler.*

## Looking back with gratitude

Even now, Carter speaks fondly of his time at Shriners Children's. "I had many traumatizing moments at that hospital, and for me to look back with glowing, happy memories – that is only because of the teams that were there, and are still there today," Carter said.

For this former patient, Shriners Children's wasn't just a hospital. It was where his story began, and where he learned that nothing, not even a prosthetic leg, could limit his potential.

As Carter embraced Dr. Schoenecker, he found himself fighting back tears. Not of sadness, but with overwhelming gratitude for the doctor who changed his life. Saying thank you was only part of his return. The rest was a quiet promise

to keep going, and to help light the way for the next kid just like him. 🙏







**systemwide**  
STRENGTH

DEDICATED TO CARING FOR MORE KIDS IN MORE PLACES

Relentless

*International Patient  
Ambassadors share  
messages of hope,  
resilience and leadership*

Hope

*Brandon and Carlota represent  
strength and possibility for  
Shriners Children's patients  
everywhere.*

**E**very year, thousands of children and teens receive life-changing care at Shriners Children's. Step into any of our locations across the United States, Mexico or Canada, and you'll encounter powerful stories of young patients who are thriving after treatment. You'll also sense that unique spirit that distinguishes Shriners Children's from other healthcare providers. >>



Two patients are selected to represent the healthcare system throughout the year. These International Patient Ambassadors are introduced in July, at an annual convention that brings together Shriners worldwide. They showcase successful outcomes and illustrate how Shriners Children's patients gain the confidence to overcome adversity and pursue their dreams.

In July, the 2025–2026 International Patient Ambassadors, Carlota and Brandon, stepped into the spotlight in Atlanta, Georgia, to express their gratitude and enthusiasm. Their year will be filled with memorable moments, including appearances at high-profile sporting events and the most widely televised parade in the world, the Tournament of Roses Parade.

## Meet Brandon

At age 6, Brandon was just a kid in South Carolina, ending his baseball season with his parents and two brothers. When he

came down with a headache and runny nose, no one thought much of it – until one morning, Brandon tried to get out of bed and collapsed. His right side was paralyzed. “It was terrifying,” his mom, Kathleen, remembers. Doctors soon diagnosed him with acute flaccid myelitis (AFM), a rare condition that attacks the spinal cord. Where most kids might get a mild cold, Brandon suddenly faced a life-threatening illness.

Brandon was admitted to a local hospital, then transferred to a rehabilitation facility as his family searched for answers. When a family friend recommended Shriners Children's Greenville, it marked a turning point. There, Brandon began intensive physical and occupational therapy.

The Pediatric Orthotic and Prosthetic Services department crafted custom braces to support his leg as he worked to regain mobility. His journey also took him to Shriners Children's Philadelphia under the care of a pediatric hand surgeon



*Brandon, 15, stands with quiet confidence, a testament to his strength and resilience as he overcomes the challenges of acute flaccid myelitis (AFM). Despite lasting effects from the illness, he continues to thrive, pursuing his passions and inspiring others with his positive spirit.*

**“Shriners  
Children’s  
showed me that  
different doesn’t  
mean impossible.”**

— BRANDON



*A competitive swimmer, Carlota captures moments behind the lens, finding new ways to express herself beyond the pool.*

**“I want to prove to myself and others that you can achieve what you set out to do.”**

— CARLOTA



known for innovative treatments for patients with AFM. There, Brandon underwent two complicated surgeries: a nerve transfer to restore function in his right arm, and a procedure to stabilize his shoulder.

Recovery is ongoing. Brandon continues to travel between Greenville and Philadelphia for therapy and checkups, managing lasting effects including scoliosis. Despite the challenges, he refuses to let AFM define him. He's taken on leadership roles, such as class president, and launched a woodworking business that produces items for the local farmers market. "AFM changed everything about my life, but Shriners Children's showed me that different doesn't mean impossible," Brandon says.

Now 15, Brandon shares his story as an International Patient Ambassador, encouraging other children and families to never give up. He dreams of studying business management in college and hopes he will inspire others to believe that, with perseverance and the right support, even the toughest obstacles can be overcome.

## Meet Carlota

Carlota's journey began in Mexico City, where she was born more than three months premature. Diagnosed with cerebral palsy and spastic hemiparesis, her doctors warned her mother, Carla, to expect a life of limits. But Carla refused to accept a future defined this way. A chance encounter led them to Shriners Children's Mexico, marking the beginning of transformative care.

Carlota's early childhood was marked by five major surgeries to correct a 12-centimeter (4.7-inch) leg length difference, long hospital stays and intensive therapy. Through every trial, Shriners Children's Mexico became her anchor. "Shriners Children's is where dreams take flight," Carlota says. It was the first place that recognized that she was a person before she was a patient.

As Carlota grew, new challenges emerged. Joint pain forced her to find creative ways to stay active. At 14, she discovered swimming through rehabilitation. The water quickly became her



sanctuary where her body felt powerful and free. What began as therapy soon turned into passion, and she started training with Mexico's national Paralympic team. By 18, she had become one of Mexico's top swimmers, ranking No. 5 in the Americas and No. 9 in the world for her category. In Carlota's sport, American rankings include North, Central and South American rankings.

Alongside her athletic pursuits, she began studying psychology in college, motivated to help fellow athletes manage both the physical and mental demands of competition.

This year, Carlota became the first International Patient Ambassador from Shriners Children's Mexico. She's eager to show others what's possible when you refuse to give up hope.

"Shriners Children's isn't just a building – it's a home, a family and an endless source of support. My mission is to show how Shriners Children's transforms lives. The courage I see in so many other patients inspires me every day."

Carlota's aspirations continue to grow: She dreams of competing for Mexico at the 2028 Paralympic Games in Los Angeles. "My biggest dream is to go to the Paralympics," she says. "I want to prove to myself, and to others, that you can achieve what you set out to do, no matter the obstacles." Her mother, Carla, who always believed in her potential, has watched her daughter become not only a champion in sports but also a role model for countless others. 🇲🇽



**GET INSPIRED** Watch our Ambassadors' amazing video online at <https://qrco.de/bgGAmu>.



## A GIFT FOR THE FUTURE

NAME: NAHOMI  
BARRAGAN-CARMONA

CONDITION: BURNS

LOCATION: NORTHERN  
CALIFORNIA



*From patient to physician: a burn survivor's journey brings her back to Shriners Children's*

When flames engulfed 16-year-old Nahomi Barragan-Carmona in a kitchen accident in Mexico, local doctors told her devastated family she wouldn't survive. With burns covering 70% of her body, her fate seemed certain – until her uncle, a firefighter, arranged her transfer to Shriners Children's Northern California, home to one of the world's premier pediatric burn centers.

Nearly two decades later, Nahomi Barragan-Carmona, M.D., returned to the very hospital that saved her life – not as a patient, but as a physician determined to bring world-class burn care back to Mexico. Her remarkable journey from survivor to healer stands as a testament to the transformative power of expert medical care.

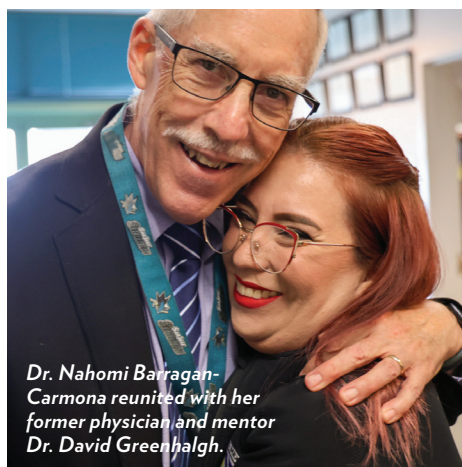
**A flight for survival**

Following her injury, young Nahomi was airlifted from Tijuana to Sacramento, where she was treated by David Greenhalgh, M.D., then chief of burns at Shriners Children's Northern California. For three grueling months, Nahomi underwent multiple skin graft surgeries and intensive physical therapy. She also received psychological support from child life specialists. Her father documented the experience in a diary, writing movingly about the comprehensive care: "Here, they heal more than just wounds – they heal hearts and futures."

During her recent month-long training at Shriners Children's Northern California, Dr. Barragan-Carmona worked alongside the same medical team that once treated her, focusing on critical burn care protocols rarely practiced in Mexican hospitals. "In Mexico, most burn patients die from shock in emergency rooms, not from their actual injuries," she explains. "At Shriners Children's, I learned the precise fluid resuscitation techniques that can prevent these needless deaths."

**Carrying it forward**

Now an emergency physician in Mexico, Dr. Barragan-Carmona is determined to transform burn care in her home country. Her journey illustrates how Shriners Children's fulfills all three pillars of its mission – providing world-class care, conducting life-changing research and educating the next generation of medical professionals.



Dr. Nahomi Barragan-Carmona reunited with her former physician and mentor Dr. David Greenhalgh.





## From Adversity to Advocacy

### Former patient shines as Ms. Wheelchair USA

The bright lights of the stage illuminated RaeAnne, a 34-year-old former patient of Shriners Children's Chicago from central Illinois, as she was crowned the new Ms. Wheelchair USA 2024–2025. Her journey to this moment began after years of exceptional care at Shriners Children's. There, she found strength, purpose and the desire to make a difference for other families facing disabilities.

RaeAnne was diagnosed with a rare neurological disorder by her pediatrician when she was 10 months old. Her family sought a second opinion at Shriners Children's, where the team determined she had transverse myelitis, a condition that can cause weakness, numbness or paralysis. At the time of her diagnosis, she

was the youngest child known to have the condition.

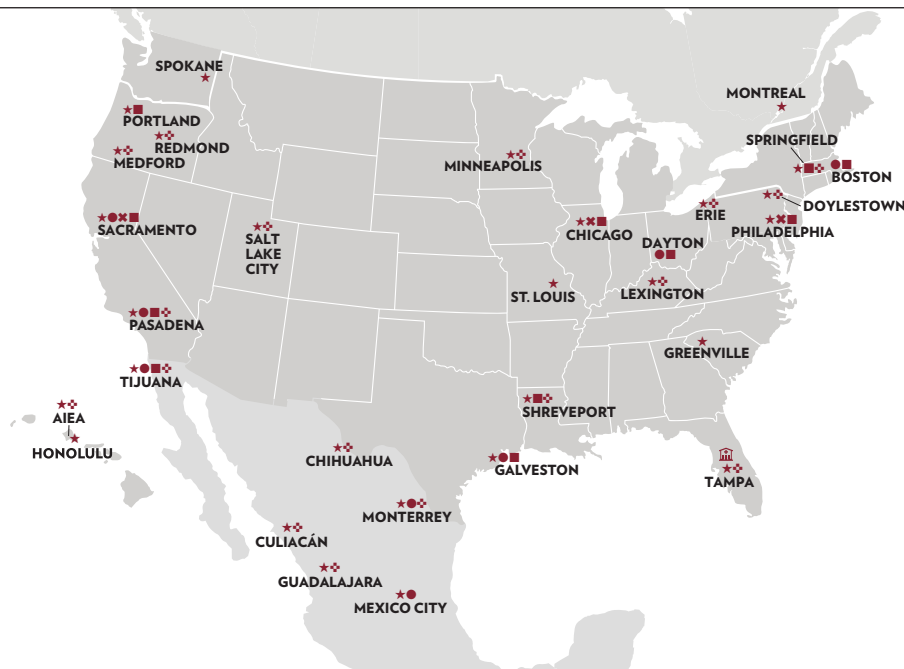
RaeAnne received treatment from the spinal cord injury (SCI) inpatient rehabilitation specialists at Shriners Children's Chicago. Facing years of occupational and physical therapy, as well as scoliosis surgery at age 11, was a challenge for the youngster. "I struggled a lot with my disability, but my team at Shriners Children's Chicago always had confidence in me," RaeAnne says.

Sara Klaas, MSW, CCM, C-ASWCM, was director of the SCI program at the time and treated RaeAnne. "Though the illness shaped RaeAnne's childhood, it never defined her. She has a spirit of resilience and a determination to live without limits," Klaas says.



RaeAnne is now a licensed social worker, a published author and research assistant at Vanderbilt University. "I promised myself I was going to be an advocate for future generations of individuals with disabilities, as all of the advocates at Shriners Children's Chicago and beyond were for me."

## LOCATIONS



- ★ Orthopedics
- Burn care
- ✕ Spinal cord injury
- Cleft lip and palate
- ⊕ Outpatient care only; necessary inpatient care provided at an affiliated facility
- 🏠 Shriners Children's and Shriners International Headquarters