

MIRACLE MAKER SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Mirian Taddei (1930 – 2017): A Life Well Lived for Others



In 2015, the Children’s Organ Transplant Association honored Dr. Mirian Taddei by presenting her the COTA Miracle Maker Award and it was, indeed, a highlight of that year’s Miracle Maker Celebration. Dr. Taddei was a long-time COTA Board Member. She was given this award (the highest COTA gives) in recognition of her many years of service to ensure transplant-needy kids receive a second chance at life.

Her connection with COTA started because of her role as a member of the Board of Directors of Arizona’s Hunter Contracting Co., which is a heavy highway construction company that was founded in the early 1960s by her late husband, Armando, and her. Dr. Taddei’s commitment to COTA specifically began in 1993 when the young son of a Hunter Contracting employee became very ill. A virus had attacked the child’s liver and a transplant was his only chance for survival. After researching various avenues for financial help, the family found COTA. Once the family officially got on board with COTA, local volunteers began working to raise funds in honor of the child. Hunter Contracting immediately began to help by organizing a very successful golf outing, which was the first of 27 golf outings the company would host to generate funds for the Children’s Organ Transplant Association. Since that first golf outing, Dr. Taddei, her late husband and the Hunter Contracting team have continued to support COTA. To date, their contributions have totaled nearly \$500,000.

Upon receipt of COTA’s Miracle Maker Award, Dr. Taddei said, “Nationwide, COTA community campaign volunteers are truly undertaking a life-saving effort. All of us working together -- volunteers, family members and Miracle Makers -- are saving lives, and we are able to rejoice when we hear that a child’s life was saved.”

Throughout her lifetime, Dr. Taddei supported many charities, but always demanded that each of those charities had to use the funds for helping people and not for administrative costs. When she learned how COTA efficiently helps transplant families, Dr. Taddei immediately jumped into action with the first golf outing and continued her support for many years after the little boy received his life-saving transplant. In 2011 Dr. Taddei created a provision in her will to support COTA when she was no

longer able to do so. She lost her valiantly fought cancer battle in June 2017, but her legacy of service and support undoubtedly lives on.

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Taryn Shappell, LCSW



Taryn Shappell is a social worker with the Pediatric Kidney Transplant Program at UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital in San Francisco, California, where she works with transplant families in the areas of counseling, advocacy and resource referrals. Throughout her tenure as a transplant social worker, Taryn readily admits she has encouraged many families on both coasts to call the Children’s Organ Transplant Association (COTA) because she “has seen how COTA has saved families during the worst time imaginable in their lives.”

A member of the Society of Transplant Social Workers, Taryn had heard COTA President Rick Lofgren and other staff members speak at annual conferences and at transplant center in-service sessions. Taryn received a bachelor’s degree in social work at Arizona State University and a master’s degree in social work at Columbia University. She has also completed a certificate in early childhood development, and through her work with families understood that COTA helped transplant families as Lofgren had explained.

Fast forward to 2016 when her sister-in-law, Shana Velazquez, texted Taryn to let her know Elijah (Taryn’s newborn nephew) had been diagnosed with biliary atresia and likely was going to need a liver transplant to survive. Taryn immediately texted back, “Call COTA NOW!” Taryn then picked up the phone and called Shana to let her know exactly what COTA was and how COTA could help. According to Taryn, “No COTA marketing materials were even necessary for that call to Shana; I knew COTA’s life-saving mission by heart.” In December 2016 Shana and Miguel Velazquez called COTA’s 800 number and shortly thereafter, Elijah became a COTA Kid.

While Shana and Miguel were deciding who to ask to be their key COTA volunteers, Aunt Taryn once again reached out and said, “I want to be the Public Relations Coordinator for the COTA fundraising effort in honor of Elijah.” The team of volunteers in California and Arizona was quickly trained and got to work raising funds for transplant-related expenses. Elijah received his life-saving liver transplant in February 2017 while the COTA team continued to fundraise. Eventually they raised nearly \$45,000

for transplant-related expenses. According to Taryn, “I never imagined we would raise the money so quickly (and relatively) easily.”

Taryn and her husband contributed to the COTA in honor of Elijah V effort -- both in terms of money and time. COTA wants to salute this amazing COTA Miracle Maker who has embodied all COTA roles -- Transplant Social Worker, COTA Volunteer, COTA Family Member and COTA Contributor – and has experienced all the ways in which COTA provides support and guidance.

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The American Legion



The American Legion was chartered and incorporated by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veterans organization devoted to mutual helpfulness. The American Legion, which is America's largest veterans service organization, works every day to uphold time-honored values including veterans, defense, youth, Americanism and communities. Its programs and outreach are designed to uplift children and youth.

The American Legion's areas of focus have allowed the nationwide advocacy group to be a strong supporter of the Children's Organ Transplant Association (COTA) for nearly three decades. The entire American Legion Family - The American Legion, The American Legion Auxiliary, The Sons of the American Legion and The American Legion Riders - provide support to COTA through financial assistance and volunteerism.

Throughout the past year, American Legion Posts, Units and Squadrons sponsored golf outings, cooked spaghetti suppers, laughed and were entertained by karaoke contests, shined their chrome for car shows and undertook many other fundraisers to contribute life-saving dollars to local or statewide COTA campaigns.

As one of COTA's longest and most ardent supports, The American Legion Family continues to give hope to transplant families across the nation. COTA families are incredibly grateful for their ongoing support. Since launching its commitment to giving kids and teens a second chance at life, this large and influential group of COTA Miracle Makers has contributed more than \$1,000,000 to COTA and to COTA community campaigns – including more than \$150,000 in the past year.

The American Legion Family has helped us maintain one of our basic organizational tenets – COTA's services are provided completely free of charge to transplant families.