



Bringing You Closer to  
the Lives You Help Change

# Connections

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Diagnosed with cerebral palsy as an infant, Elijah Blasingame (above left) faces very different challenges than his identical twin, Aaron, does.

After a recent complex surgery at Gillette, Elijah (shown below right with his physical therapist) began to gain new skills. "With hard work and a little adaptation, Elijah can do the same activities as his brother can," says his mother.

## Surprise, It's Twins!

### *Unforeseen Complications Introduce a Family to Your Generosity*

*Tears streamed down her face as her eyes remained fixed on the screen. Although it's hard for her to admit it, they were not tears of joy. "Two babies?" thought Janelle Berry-Blasingame. "How am I going to do this?"*

She was halfway through her pregnancy when an ultrasound revealed that she was carrying identical twin boys. And then, in the next beat, she discovered that her babies were in danger. "I barely had a chance to let the news sink in, when they said I was already dilated," she remembers. "That's when the fear of raising two babies changed to panic for their safety."

#### **Born at 26 Weeks**

Doctors prescribed complete bed rest at home, which kept labor at bay for six weeks. "I remember pleading with the doctors, saying, 'No, we need a few more weeks — just a few more weeks,'" Berry-Blasingame says. "But I was losing amniotic fluid, so we couldn't wait any longer."

Elijah and Aaron Blasingame came into the world at 26 weeks' gestation, each weighing just over 2 pounds. The boys spent 10 weeks in a neonatal intensive care unit, where brain scans helped to diagnose Elijah with cerebral palsy — a complex condition that causes muscles to be abnormally tight and contracted.

#### **Diagnosed as an Infant**

As the boys grew, it became more and more apparent that Elijah was facing challenges his brother wasn't. "When Elijah was 18 months old, our doctors said they couldn't provide the care

he needed," Berry-Blasingame remembers. "They said we needed to go to Gillette."

Realizing that her identical sons faced far different futures was difficult. "I worried that Elijah wouldn't be able to play sports and do things like his brother would," Berry-Blasingame says. "And I worried that Aaron would feel that Elijah got all of the attention because of his special needs."

#### **Changed Forever by Gillette's Expertise**

At Gillette, however, the family learned how to help Elijah while keeping the boys' connection strong. Gillette eased Elijah's tight muscles with medical treatments, assistive technology and ongoing therapy. Whenever possible, Aaron was involved in his brother's treatments.

When Elijah turned 5, he underwent selective dorsal rhizotomy surgery — a complex procedure in which a neurosurgeon cuts the sensory nerve rootlets in the spinal cord that are contributing to

*Elijah's story continued  
on Page 4*



## INSIDE

*Stories to  
Inspire You!*

2

Artist Provides Comfort,  
Celebrates Your Gifts

3

You Bring Care  
Close to Home

4

Buy a Blizzard,  
Help a Child



## A Word From Our President

*Margaret Perryman*

### Your Gifts Help Us Exceed Expectations

When you come to a hospital, there are certain things that you expect. You expect that the medical staff and nursing staff will be knowledgeable and compassionate. You expect to have access to necessary technology and diagnostic services. You expect to see the specialists you need under one roof. And you expect care that places you and your family at the center of the team.

In today's landscape, however, state budget cuts and other financial challenges have caused health-care organizations to retrench and cut programs. Significant growth in the number of people needing health care has stretched the resources of hospitals and clinics. And although people with conditions that once caused early death are now surviving, their health-care needs are often complex.

Such developments present significant challenges to providing high-quality, cost-effective care. With your support and our conservative financial strategy, however, Gillette delivers care that families *should* expect. If you simply helped us maintain our high levels of service, you would be changing lives. But you push us to do more than that.

The expansion efforts underway at Gillette illustrate my point beautifully. We told you that we needed more intensive-care space, larger operating rooms and better outpatient facilities. Individuals, corporations and foundations responded not only by supporting those initiatives, but also by providing amenities that promote comfort and healing.

Dairy Queen, for example, is funding a welcome center that will serve as a cozy place to relax in the middle of a hectic appointment schedule. Support from Friends of Gillette helped us build a comfortable family lounge in our new Pediatric Intensive Care Unit. And discussions are underway to add more family accommodations, a healing garden and a therapy playground.

Because of you, we provide a level of service that is unmatched. On behalf of our patients and families, I offer my sincerest thanks.



### Art Provides Comfort During a Time of Change

Karolyn Stirewalt isn't a doctor or a nurse, but she's dedicated to promoting healing and improving the health-care system. An attorney for the Minnesota Medical Association and a lifelong artist, Stirewalt is blazing a unique path toward her vision.



"In my work, I kept coming across research about the influence of art on healing," she says. "I saw a pattern: when people feel connected to and inspired by their surroundings, they heal faster."

#### Her Healing Vision Comes to Gillette

Stirewalt founded Splash of Red Studio as a way to bring inspiration and solace to patients and their health-care teams. Her most recent piece is a painted mural that she donated to Gillette. The 16- by 7-foot installation creates a vibrant and cheerful mood amidst significant changes at the hospital.

"I tried to create an image that was inspiring for both patients and staff," Stirewalt says. "I also wanted to honor those who have made possible all of the great things that are happening at Gillette right now."

#### Look for Familiar Faces!

The image depicts patients and staff outside Gillette's new patient-care building and skyway. Familiar St. Paul landmarks, including sponsors of Gillette's expansion, scatter the landscape. Patients will notice children who look like they do — children who use wheelchairs, wear braces, or go through life with the help of an assistance dog. They'll also see some familiar faces. Stirewalt included images of actual Gillette staff members and volunteers among the crowd.

"I hope that patients will say, 'Wow, that child looks like me!'" says Stirewalt. "Or, 'That's my doctor! I know him!'" Another fun touch: the windows, moon and stars on the mural glow in the dark. "I wanted to convey a welcoming message — that the lights are always on at Gillette," she adds.

#### See It Today!

The mural is located on the hospital's fourth floor, where it will remain until a new coffee shop opens this fall. The mural will then move to other areas affected by expansion projects.

"I feel honored to be working with such a wonderful organization," Stirewalt says. "I hope the piece brings joy to Gillette's patients and staff."

For more of Stirewalt's work, visit her website at [www.splashofredstudio.com](http://www.splashofredstudio.com).

# You Bring Care Close to Home!

## Aiden's Family Is Thankful for New Brainerd Lakes Clinic

*Stephanie Domski doesn't like to think about how things would be without Gillette's services nearby. "It's hard to admit, but we would do a lot less for Aiden," she says of her 6-year-old son, who has cerebral palsy. "With five kids, we couldn't drive almost 200 miles every time he needed a visit."*

Not only would the distance be a challenge for the Domskis, but so would the costs involved. "It's gas, a hotel room, time off work for my husband, and meals on the road," she adds. "There's no way."

### Not Quite a House Call — But Close

But the Domskis don't need to travel to St. Paul to obtain specialty care for their son. The family is one of hundreds that benefits each year from Gillette's Mobile Outreach Clinic — a program that brings specialty medical, assistive-technology, and other services to families throughout greater Minnesota. And now, Gillette is opening a permanent clinic in the Brainerd Lakes area to provide even greater service to local families.

Aiden first visited a Gillette outreach site when he was 18 months old and still not walking. The diagnosis: cerebral palsy. "At first I was devastated, thinking about how hard things would be for him growing up," Domski says. "But it was a relief to know that we could get Gillette's services so close to home."

### Family Impressed by Our Teamwork

Over the years, Aiden has visited Gillette outreach sites for medical care and assistive-technology services. He received injections to manage the spasticity in his muscles, custom braces for leg support, and seating systems from certified specialists.

In March, Aiden had an intrathecal baclofen pump implanted at Gillette's main hospital in St. Paul. The pump delivers a medicine that helps control muscle spasticity. "The specialists at our outreach site worked with the St. Paul team to make sure everything went smoothly," Domski says.



*Stephanie Domski says that her son, Aiden (pictured at center with three of his siblings: Addy, Kendra and Brienna) wouldn't get the care he needs without Gillette's services nearby. (Not pictured: big brother Tristan)*

### Outreach Clinic Finds Permanent Home in Brainerd

Although it's still early, the Domskis are thrilled with the pump's results. "His muscle tone has improved so much that we're hopeful he'll gain even more skills as he gets stronger," Domski says. "With four siblings to keep up with, that's huge!"

Because Aiden needs so many Gillette services, the Domskis say they were thrilled to learn that Gillette is opening a permanent clinic site in the Brainerd Lakes area. The clinic will house an assistive-technology laboratory and will serve as a home base for providers serving Brainerd Lakes and northern Minnesota outreach sites. "Having more services in our area is a huge blessing!" Domski says.

**OUR NEW  
Brainerd Lakes  
Clinic!**  
15860 Audubon Way  
Baxter, MN 56401  
800-578-4266

## YOU SUPPORT WISE INVESTMENTS!

### Better Service Doesn't Have to Cost More



*Aiden Domski*

Gillette's mission has always been to use its resources wisely — and the new Brainerd Lakes Clinic is a perfect example! The costs involved in opening a new assistive-technology laboratory and clinic were balanced by significant reductions in transportation and staff costs. "Having a launching point in Brainerd instead of in St. Paul will save us thousands of miles and hundreds of hours of staff time," says Dave Wilkie, manager of outreach services.

Gillette will put those savings toward providing even better service for families in greater Minnesota. Wilkie expects that the Brainerd Lakes base will allow Gillette providers to visit northern Minnesota outreach sites much more frequently.

Gillette's outreach program already saves families more than 700,000 miles of travel each year — a number expected to grow. "For families like ours, getting good care would be impossible without Gillette's outreach clinics," says Stephanie Domski. "Our whole family — but especially Aiden — wants to say, 'Thank you!'"

## It's Easy to Support Gillette This Summer!

### How to Make an Impact

- **Become a Guardian Angel** sustaining donor. Go to [www.gillettechildrens.org/guardianangels](http://www.gillettechildrens.org/guardianangels) and sign up to donate automatically every month to Gillette. It's a great way to budget your charitable donations and to support Gillette year-round.
- **Follow our blog.** Visit our blog, Inside Gillette, at [www.gillettechildrens.org/blog](http://www.gillettechildrens.org/blog) for the latest Gillette news, events, patient stories — even health and safety tips. With posts nearly every day, there's always something new to see. While you're there, leave a comment to let us know what you think.
- **Find us on Facebook and other sites.** You'll connect with other Gillette supporters online! Join Gillette's growing presence on three popular sites: Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia. Visit [www.gillettechildrens.org/socialmedia](http://www.gillettechildrens.org/socialmedia).
- **Buy a gift for someone you love through Giftback.com.** Designate Gillette as your charity of choice, and 10 percent of your purchase will go to Gillette. Visit [www.giftback.com/gillette](http://www.giftback.com/gillette) for more details.
- **Purchase a gift card to Creative Kidstuff for Gillette.** Go to [www.creativekidstuff.com](http://www.creativekidstuff.com) and click on "Help Us Help Kids." We'll use the card to purchase needed toys and supplies for our patients. For every \$250 in gift cards that we receive, Creative Kidstuff will give us an additional \$50 credit!

*Connections* is a quarterly publication of Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare. Direct comments and questions to the Gillette Children's Foundation office at 651-229-1726 or [foundation@gillettechildrens.com](mailto:foundation@gillettechildrens.com).

## Miracle Days Fast Approaching!

### Two Ways to Support Gillette This Summer and Fall

In the most recent *Connections*, we told you about Gillette's relationship with Children's Miracle Network, a network of children's hospitals throughout the U.S. We offered simple ways for you to support our hospital by visiting local restaurants, retailers, and other community businesses that raise funds for Gillette through Children's Miracle Network. Now we're excited to announce two fast-approaching opportunities to get involved, whether you're at work or at play.

#### 1 Buy a Blizzard, Help a Child

What's every child's favorite treat? Ice cream, of course! On Thursday, Aug. 5, Dairy Queen hosts Miracle Treat Day — a day-long event during which Dairy Queen locations in Minnesota and western Wisconsin donate a portion of Blizzard proceeds to Gillette. It's a perfect reason for a family trip to Dairy Queen. And, as we like to say, calories don't count on Miracle Treat Day! To find a participating store near you, visit [www.miracletreatday.com](http://www.miracletreatday.com).

#### 2 Go Casual for Kids

Think you can only help Gillette during your free time? Think again. Wednesday, Sept. 15, is Miracle Jeans Day. Employees donate \$5 for the privilege of wearing jeans to work. And any company can participate. Just ask your manager or human resources department to sign up by calling 651-229-1709 (Twin Cities) or 218-624-4790 (northern Minnesota).

*Photo above: Gillette patient Bella helped us celebrate Miracle Treat Day last year. To learn about Bella's recent trip to Washington, D.C., see the Children's Miracle Network insert in your newsletter.*



*Elijah's story continued from Page 1*

a child's muscle spasticity. The choice came with some reservations. "It's a permanent procedure, so there's no going back," says Berry-Blasingame.

#### Both Boys Now Active

Today, Elijah and his family know they made the right choice. After surgery and several weeks of rehabilitation, Elijah is making great strides. "It's the little surprises that get you," says Berry-Blasingame. "Like the day he could finally touch the bottom of the pool because his muscles weren't so contracted. Or the time I realized he could push himself on his bike."

She believes strongly that Elijah would be much further behind his peers had he not had the surgery. And his most important peer, of course, is his twin brother. "With hard work and a little adaptation, Elijah can do the same activities as his brother can," she says. "They have an amazingly close relationship, and Gillette has helped it stay that way!"

### You Support Life-Changing Procedures!

Children like Elijah need medical and surgical interventions throughout their lifetimes. Outpatient procedures and advanced surgeries can change a child's life. Today at Gillette, however, our surgical spaces can no longer keep pace with demand. Your gifts ensure that we have ample space to care for our patients. Learn how you can help at [www.gillettechildrens.org/expansion](http://www.gillettechildrens.org/expansion).