

greenwich time

Smile Greenwich fundraisers, and the Junior League raffle



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Lisa Lori of Greenwich began fundraising for Operation Smile after her three sons -- Zack (18), Luke (16), and Griffin (15) were born with physical challenges.

Greenwich woman raises awareness for Operation Smile

GREENWICH — A Greenwich woman turned her story of pain into one of promise after each of her three sons was born with physical challenges.

Lisa Lori, who runs Perfect Provenance and Café 47 in Greenwich, said strangers used to stare at her children. "The insensitivity of complete strangers was boundless," said Lori.

She has three boys — Zack, who is now 18, Luke, 16, and Griffin, 15 — all of whom were born with a rare condition known as facial paralysis.

"I remember when my first son was born. I was so happy. Then, the doctor told us the news," Lori said. "It was catastrophic — like a punch. I was scared because when you have a child with a facial anomaly you don't know how the world is going to treat him."

The paralysis meant they didn't have use of the muscles in their face, "which impacts their speech, as well as their ability to smile, eat and close their mouth," Lori said.

Fear set in as the perplexed medical community said, "We'd have to learn to live with it," Lori recalled.

But she was determined to help. "As a parent, I didn't want my boys sitting in a corner not engaging in life. It took eight years, but we found a surgeon in Toronto who performs muscle transplant surgeries for children with nerve or muscle damage in the face," said Lori. "He took our case.

"The boys have had over 20 surgeries collectively, and we've seen remarkable improvement over the years," she added.

Lori wanted to give back to other children born with facial conditions. Through the plastic surgeon, she found out about Operation Smile, an international nonprofit that offers free surgeries to children and young adults born with a cleft lip, cleft palate or other facial differences.

"I first held a fundraiser for the organization a decade ago, and we raised \$85,000," said Lori. "It's something we now do annually for the Operation Smile because we know how life-changing surgery can be."

Last fall, she co-chaired an event called Smile Greenwich, where more than \$250,000 was raised to benefit Operation Smile. Lori will run the event again this year at the Belle Haven Club on Nov. 16.

She also sells Smile Collection products year round at Perfect Provenance. For Father's Day, she will be selling golf balls that say "Smile More" and organic T-shirts for men that say "Smile More" or "Smile Greenwich."

Zack, Luke and Griffin are thriving and living productive lives. Lori has a message for all moms, "We're all trying to do the best we can. You can't beat yourself up if everything isn't perfect. I think doing your best as a mother is the mark we should all strive to achieve."

For more information on Operation Smile, visit www.operationssmile.org.