



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrew J. Lanza

Elissa Montanti

ANDREW J. LANZA May 11, 2011



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Award: HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

Year: 2011

A child's plea for help, asking "God and all merciful people to help me getting prosthetics", forever changed Elissa Montanti's thinking, and her life. Those words, written in a 1996 letter by a Bosnian boy, Kenan Malkic, who had stepped on a land mine and lost both arms and one leg, moved American Medical Technician Elissa Montanti into action to help child victims of the 1990's war in Bosnia & Herzegovina, in the former Yugoslavia.

A native of Staten Island, Ms. Montanti was in her 20s when, within a short period of time, the untimely deaths of her mother and her grandparents left her overwhelmed with grief. In an effort to overcome the impact of her losses, she reached out to help child victims of Bosnia's civil war. After meeting with the United Nations Ambassador, she immediately began to recruit airlines, hospitals, physicians and prosthetic companies to donate their services. Because of her efforts, Kenan received two new arms, a new leg, and with them, a new life.

Soon after, Ms. Montanti founded the non-profit, non-partisan Global Medical Relief Fund (GMRF), whose mission is to aid children who are missing or have lost the use of limbs or eyes, have been severely burned, or have been injured through war, natural disaster or illness.

In her own words, Ms. Montanti has brought together a unique team that "makes miracles happen." She feels that each child she is able to help through the GMRF becomes an "ambassador" who can return home not only with a healed, mended body, a new hope for life, but also with an experience of "America at its best." Witnessing the human suffering during visits to Bosnia, Iraq and Haiti has only confirmed that charity is so much bigger than one person.

Ms. Montanti has been featured in newspapers, on television and radio broadcasts and in books and magazines. In addition, she has been honored with numerous awards.

Ms. Montanti was ahead of her time in advocating for the needs of those stricken by disaster. Along with her adopted son Kenan and her dog, Shilo, Ms. Montanti continues to be a true and genuine inspiration and role model for others.