



Patient's Birthday Wishes Benefit Shriners Hospitals

(NAPSA)—Osteogenesis imperfecta are big words, especially for a 6-year-old. But the words are a medical term that Leigh Dittman is not only able to easily say; she knows exactly what it means.

Leigh was registered as a patient at Shriners Hospitals for Children—Tampa before she was even born. Her parents realized their baby would need orthopaedic care when technicians noticed Leigh's legs were shorter than normal during one of Ellen Dittman's sonograms. Doctors were unable to diagnose the problem before Leigh's birth but knew it was orthopaedic-related. Ellen and her husband, David, contacted the Tampa Shriners Hospital.

When Leigh was born, she measured only 15.5 inches long, and doctors discovered she had broken five ribs and fractured a femur in utero. A few hours after her birth, Leigh was diagnosed with osteogenesis imperfecta (OI), a genetic disorder caused by imperfectly formed bone collagen. The condition is commonly known as "brittle bone disease" and is characterized by bones that break easily, often from little or no apparent cause.

First Treatment At 3 Weeks Old

Leigh received her first treatment at the Tampa Shriners Hospital when she was three weeks old. She now goes in every few months to receive intravenous medicine meant to increase bone density, but Leigh usually stops by the hospital at least once a month to visit her doctors and the many friends she's made there. "We love it," said Ellen. "That hospital is like our second home."

In appreciation of the loving care Leigh receives at the Tampa hospi-



Leigh and her father, David, accept a donation to the Leigh Dittman Foundation. Leigh's third-annual fundraising event raised more than \$50,000 for the Tampa Shriners Hospital.

tal, the Dittman family began raising money for Shriners Hospitals. "It was actually Leigh's idea," said Ellen. "She says Shriners helps her, so she wanted to help them."

An Overwhelming Response

Beginning with Leigh's fourth birthday party in 2004, the Dittmans asked that, in lieu of bringing gifts, guests donate money to Shriners Hospitals. Due to the overwhelming response from loved ones and the community, Leigh and her family decided to make it an annual fundraising event.

Approximately 450 people attended Leigh's sixth birthday party in August. The event, which included dinner, a special video about the Tampa Shriners Hospital, a chance drawing, a silent auction and dancing, raised more than \$50,000. In total, Leigh's birthday party extravaganzas have resulted in nearly \$78,000 in donations to the Tampa Shriners Hospital.