

Manhasset Physician Flies Compassionate Mission

By Angela T. Barbuti

Love was literally in the air this Valentine's Day when David Edelson, M.D., founder of the HealthBridge wellness complex in Manhasset, voluntarily completed a flight mission which benefited an 8-year-old transplant patient. He flew the young girl from her treatment at the Children's Hospital of Boston to her Oneonta, NY home.

Edelson is one of 1,500 volunteer pilots who fly for AirLifeLine, a nationwide nonprofit organization that offers free air travel to patients with financial need. AirLifeLine, the oldest and largest national volunteer pilot organization in the country, helps to ensure that people throughout the United States can benefit from equal access to healthcare.

Edelson's passion for flying combined with his concern for others make him a model pilot for this worthwhile organization. Pilots must provide an aircraft, which for Edelson is the Piper Twin Comanche he owns with his father, and donate the entire cost of each flight, including fuel and landing fees. Since he began flying for AirLifeLine eight years ago, Edelson has flown at least 25 missions, undoubtedly impacting the lives of all his passengers. It is in their expressions of

gratitude, that Edelson is rewarded for his generosity. On one mission, Edelson brought a man dying of colon cancer back home to die surrounded by his family. The man, who also happened to be one of Dr. Edelson's patients, told him he did not think he could tolerate the long car ride and could not afford air travel. Edelson suggested he contact AirLifeLine and offered to personally grant his patient this wish. "Three days later, we were at the airport loading him into my Piper Twin Comanche, where on a crystal clear fall afternoon, we took the 350 mile trip back to Morgantown, VA," Edelson remembered. "As we flew into the brilliant sunset, the patient had tears in his eyes, both for the beauty of the experience of flight, and in gratitude for making his last wish come true. He died three weeks later." Another reaction Edelson remembers is that of a 4-year-old girl born with facial deformities whom he flew home after her surgery at Cornell University Hospital. "She was a quiet, serious girl, but loved the airplane rides, eagerly jumping into the backseat and strapping herself in. She sat glued to the window the entire trip, and after landing gave me a big kiss to thank me for the ride," Edelson said.

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Edelson learned the art of aviation from his father, who was a flight instructor. He began flight lessons at the early age of 13, completing his first solo flight at 16, before he even learned to drive. Although Edelson always loved to fly, he chose to professionally pursue medicine, founding HealthBridge, a medical facility located at 1165 Northern Blvd. in Manhasset. This unique healthcare complex offers cardiac imaging and risk assessment, cancer screenings, nutritional and physical fitness testing, psychological stress analysis and diagnostic sleep studies. Edelson specializes in Integrative Medicine, a new approach to healthcare that combines medical practices with more holistic treatments. Although he is also an assistant professor of medicine at Albert Einstein Medical School and a faculty member of the North Shore-LIJ Hospital System,

Edelson is still able to volunteer his time to serve others. Through AirLifeLine, he has found a way to put his passion for flying to work for the benefit of many.

With the help of pilots like Edelson, AirLifeLine flew approximately 9,500 passengers to nearly 450 destinations in 2002 alone. In addition to its medical and transplant missions, it also orchestrates humanitarian missions for people with special needs. This charitable organization plans disaster-relief missions as well as cargo missions which transport blood, organs, or tissue. AirLifeLine is funded entirely by tax deductible donations and therefore relies on the generosity of individuals, foundations, and corporations to assist with this worthy cause. For information on how to make a financial contribution to AirLifeLine, please visit their website at www.AirLifeLine.org.