

GOOD CITIZENSHIP

Gift Of Life Spans America And Southeast Asia

(NAPSA)—Rather than Superman, Spiderman or a star athlete, 11-year-old Baxter Chua's hero is a complete stranger—someone who lives several continents and oceans apart from him, but someone who gave him a second chance at life.

At age 8, Baxter was diagnosed with leukemia and needed a marrow or blood stem cell donor for his lifesaving transplant. A search of the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) Registry revealed a donor and Baxter, who lives in Malaysia, was flown to England for a transplant. Today, Baxter is healthy, back at school, busy playing with his friends and looking forward to the future. Someday, he and his parents hope to meet his real-life hero in person.

"People often wonder what the meaning of life is, what is our *raison d'être*? My answer came from a child whom I've never met," Ron Balbuena, Baxter's donor, said. "As much as I have made it possible for Baxter to have a future to look forward to, I know that he has given equally as much to me. He has given my life a purpose, a direction, a *raison d'être*."

Balbuena, a Filipino American graduate student from California, learned about the need for volunteer donors from the Asian/Pacific Islander community while he was an undergraduate. For the procedure, he spent half a day in a hospital, where a small portion of stem cells was removed from his hip bone while he was under general anesthesia.

"All I knew about marrow donation was that, by registering, I could have a chance, however small, to one day save



Volunteer marrow and blood stem cell donors, like Ron Balbuena, are needed to give the gift of life.

another person's life, to be a hero," he said. "I felt a little sore after the procedure but whatever discomfort I may have felt was worth it."

After his donation, Balbuena decided to put his personal experience to use, working as a recruiter with Asians for Miracle Marrow Matches, a Los Angeles-based recruitment group for the NMDP, encouraging the Asian and Pacific Islander community to become volunteer donors.

In the spirit of Asian/Pacific Islander Heritage Month, the NMDP, Balbuena and the Chua family are encouraging Asians and Pacific Islanders to make a difference and give the gift of life by becoming donors on the NMDP Registry.

"We give a zillion thanks for what Ron did. There are no words appropriate enough to describe our appreciation for such a gift. He gave us our son back," said Boon-Siong Chua, Baxter's father. "It is our dream to someday meet Ron to thank him in person."

Stem cell transplants require matching certain tissue traits of the donor and patient. Because of the characteristics that determine whether a donor and patient match are inherited, a patient's best chance of finding a matched donor is from his or her own racial or ethnic group. Although more minority patients are finding donors for their transplants, they are still less likely than Caucasians to identify a matched donor. More African Americans, Asian and Pacific Islanders, Hispanics and American Indian and Alaska Natives are needed as volunteer donors.

The NMDP facilitates unrelated marrow and blood stem cell transplants through an extensive network of national and international affiliates. By recruiting committed donors, maintaining the largest and most diverse registry of potential volunteer donors in the world and offering patient services, the NMDP arranges for at least 140 stem cell transplants each month. The NMDP Registry contains more than four million volunteers and is the only one that searches all three sources of stem cells available: marrow, peripheral blood and umbilical cord blood.

For more information about how to become a donor on the NMDP Registry, call 1-800-MARROW-2 or visit www.marrow.org.