

Giving the gift of life

Ethiopian boy receives surgery to remove non-malignant tumor through Rotary Club

By DWIGHT DANA
Staff Writer

ddana@florencenews.com

FLORENCE

A non-malignant brain tumor that could have blinded a 10-year-old Ethiopian boy has been removed, but the world's best surgeons would be hard pressed to detach the thankful smile across his face.

Dagmawi Solomon spent six hours under the skillful hands of Florence neurosurgeon Dr. Andrew H. Rhea during the meticulous surgery May 29 at McLeod Regional Medical Center. He then spent five days in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, lighting it up with an infectious grin that has melted the hearts of the ICU staff.

But Wednesday afternoon, he was ready to meet the press in the spacious pediatric playground that is filled with toys. He was wheeled in by his public relations agent, Dr. Solomon Demamu, who serves full-time as his father.

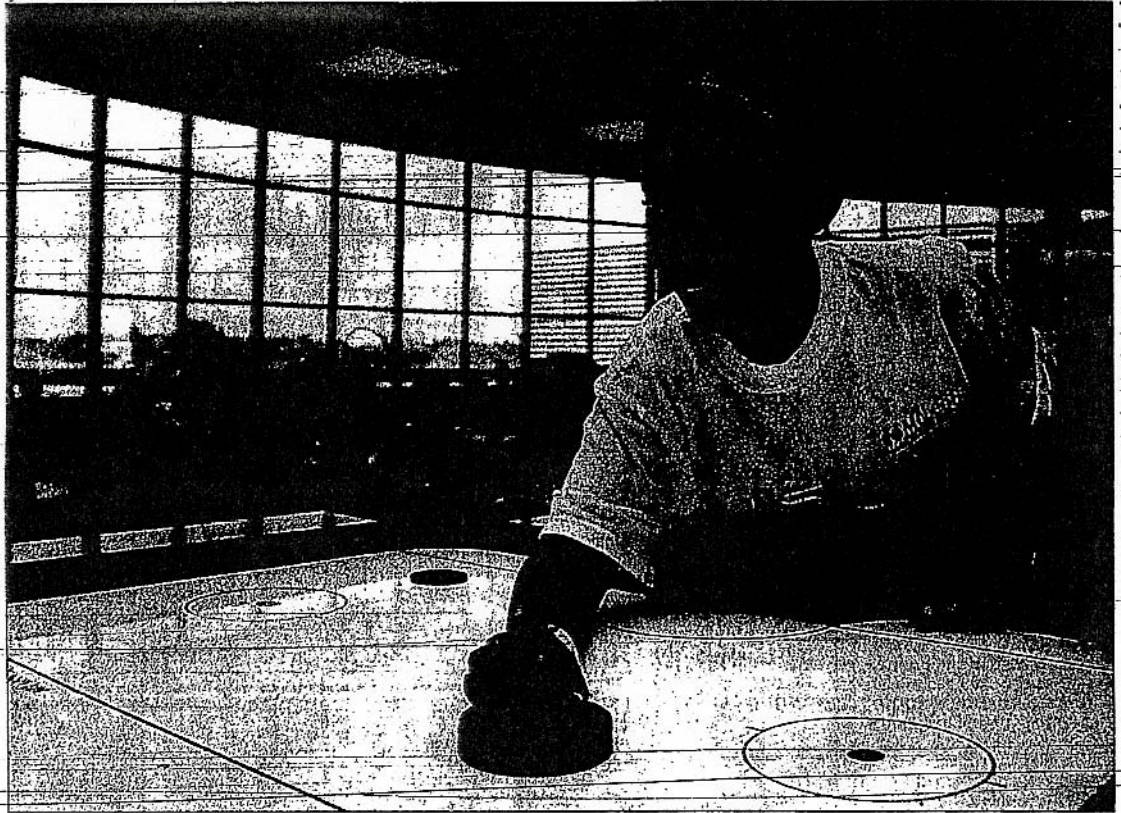
Dagmawi let his smile do the talking for him, and it spoke volumes as he played with a toy train while having his picture taken. His concentration was broken only when he looked up briefly, just long enough to ask a Morning News photographer why his hair was so long.

Sporting a McLeod Children's Miracle Telethon T-shirt with "Together we can make miracles happen" written across the back, he moved over to the air hockey table and promptly scored three straight goals.

Despite being a study in concentration, the smile became even broader.

Dagmawi wasn't too much for conversation with all the distractions. That's why he brought his own spokesman to the room.

His father, a public health doctor in Awassa, Ethiopia, said Dagmawi first started showing troubling symptoms last September. He got violent headaches and his normally placid behavior started to



STAFF/CARL WILSON

Dagmawi Solomon, a 10-year-old boy from Ethiopia, plays air hockey with his father, Dr. Solomon Demamu Wednesday in Florence. Dagmawi was brought over to Florence from Ethiopia to have a non-malignant brain tumor removed. The operation was performed at McLeod Children's Hospital.

change. The brain tumor was discovered when he began having eye problems and went in for a checkup in January.

Demamu said Ethiopia, with a teeming population of 60 million, is a poor country and doesn't have the medical facilities to perform such an acute operation. He immediately contacted the Children's Cross Connection International office in Ethiopia.

After being turned down for the operation in another major southern city, he got hooked up with the Florence Rotary Club through Rotary International's Gift of Life program. The program helps children in similar circumstances with the assistance of local Rotary clubs.

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— Dr. Solomon Demamu, Dagmawi Solomon's father

mankind has been good to mankind," said Demamu, who has been by his son's side since he arrived at McLeod. "I could have lost my child if this miraculous chain of events had not happened."

Demamu said everybody — from the surgeons to the hospital staff to the members of the Rotary Club — has gone out of his way to assist Dagmawi. He said Walker Floyd, Florence Rotarian in charge of the Gift of Life pro-

gram, has been especially helpful. Meanwhile, Susanne Owens, a registered nurse in charge of McLeod Children's Hospital and Pediatric ICU, said Dagmawi has been a model patient.

"He is a very friendly and appreciative young man," she said. "He has really been looking forward to being in an American newspaper."

Dagmawi said he is looking forward to going home to see his mother and 8-year-old sister. The

fourth grader also is anxious to start playing soccer and his computer games again.

But he is tugging at heart strings while he's here. "I got kisses from him and he said he was going to stay here and let his father go home," pediatric dietitian Mimi Girten said with a laugh. "I'm going to take Dr. Demamu shopping tonight, but I don't believe I'll be able to talk him into leaving Dagmawi with us."

Dagmawi's operation was made possible through the Gift of Life program, McLeod Children's Hospital, Florence Neurosurgical and Spine, Children's Cross Connection International, Florence Regional Airport and US Air