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## Group renews campaign to help Loreto girl (4/4)

By Whitney Youngs

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Last July, the Hermosa Beach Sister City Association made a commitment to a young girl from Loreto, Mexico, to raise funds for reconstructive surgery to correct her rare birth defect. The girl, Miriam Murillo, suffers from what is known as a cleft palate.

At the time, the estimated cost of the surgery was \$10,000. Almost one year later, the hospital costs associated with the series of surgeries -- scheduled over a three-year period -- have doubled.

The association, in conjunction with Redondo Beach resident Roger Bacon, hopes to raise the extra funds needed for the 16-year-old by way of a banner program established in the city last December.

"She has had one surgery so far, which entailed a bone graft from her hip to make a palate in her mouth," said George Barks, an association board member. "She has also had several orthodontic surgeries including new braces. Her second biggest surgery will be in July. Doctors will cut her upper jaw and move it forward so that her mouth is in alignment. It will require a three-day hospital stay. This is a fairly involved and long-term project."

The banner program, which could generate approximately \$7,500 for Murillo, allows for businesses such as Peyton Cramer Ford and Hawthorne Savings to sponsor charity organizations in exchange for advertising their support in the form of a banner displayed across a city street.

Aside from the banner program, Bacon and Barks will work closely together to coordinate additional fund-raising efforts.

The new banner will be displayed beginning April 15 at Pacific Coast Highway and First Street. Hawthorne Savings will advertise for two months, donating \$5,000 to Murillo's fund. Bacon hopes to convince another business to buy advertising space for one additional month which is worth \$2,500.

"The banner program is one way to raise some of this money," said Barks. "Everything is still in the conceptual stages, but we are also thinking of a possible auction at Greenwood Park and we are also looking into possibly auctioning off a new car."

Murillo was born with the rare deformity that left her with several facial disfigurements to her nose, lips and mouth. She first visited Hermosa Beach several years ago as a participant in the association's exchange program aimed at fostering cultural ties between the two cities.

The thought of helping Murillo was suggested by then-Sister City Association President Richard McCurdy, who enlisted the help of fellow member Barks. McCurdy organized the fund-raising efforts while Barks searched for doctors who could correct Murillo's condition and would perform the surgery either free of charge or at a reduced rate.

"George Barks is a hero and he is working with Roger to raise more funds," said McCurdy. "We are not going to let an additional \$7,500 stop Miriam from getting the medical treatment she needs. She is a beautiful girl and she deserves this."

Barks found Stephen Yen, an orthodontic specialist, who has worked to reshape the roof of Murillo's mouth, and plastic surgeon John Gross, who will reconstruct Murillo's nose and upper lip in the near future.

Gross also convinced the Los Angeles Childrens Hospital's facial and cranial team to evaluate Murillo. Murillo has and will undergo between three and five surgeries worth approximately \$160,000.

"Miriam is a very sweet and nice young lady who radiates an awful lot of happiness," said Bacon. "I want to do what I can to provide as much money as possible for this wonderful girl."

The association originally raised about \$10,000 that was expected to cover all of Murillo's medical costs, but since then, the expenses have increased to an estimated \$20,000. Murillo visits Hermosa Beach every six weeks, where Yen adjusts an appliance in her mouth to prepare her for the next surgery in July.

Those interested in donating a tax-deductible contribution to Murillo may call McCurdy at 374-4072 or Barks at 379-2538.