



\$750,000 goes to eye care

Money donated to build hospital for children in India

MORE INFORMATION about how to donate money toward the children's eye hospital can be found at eyefoundationofamerica.org, or donations can be mailed to Eye Foundation of America, 3140 Collins Ferry Road, Morgantown, WV 26505.

MORGANTOWN OPHTHALMOLOGIST V.K. Raju is one of 51 eye doctors in West Virginia who participates in a special program aimed at providing eye care to senior citizens. **Page 1-B.**

BY J. MILES LAYTON

The Dominion Post

Three area businessmen have pledged nearly \$1 million to the Eye Foundation of America to help build a children's eye hospital in India.

Every year, Dr. V.K. Raju, a Morgantown ophthalmologist and founder of the Eye Foundation, treats patients in the remotest parts of Asia and Africa. On one trip to a distant corner of India, Raju met a family with two small children who traveled a long way to visit the eye

SEE EYE CARE, 2A

EYE CARE

FROM PAGE 1A

clinic where he was treating patients. One of the little boys needed eye-glasses. If his 1-year-old brother didn't have an operation to restore his sight soon, he would be blind for the rest of his life.

"If we can treat children, give them sight, we can change a life," Raju said. "One simple operation can give a child 70 years of life."

To further these ends, Raju wants to build a state-of-the-art children's eye hospital in southern India.

"What we are trying to do is eliminate preventable blindness in a world where accessibility to eye care is tough," Raju said.

The new hospital will train eye doctors from around the world while providing high-quality care to the



V.K. Raju



Jay Reddy



Joe Swiger

local population.

"Sharing knowledge will make a big difference if we can train others," Raju said. "Eye problems can be prevented as well as cured in all parts of the globe, from the furthest reaches of Africa to the Himalayas in Asia."

Raju's foundation needs \$4 million to pay for the construction and equipment costs needed to make this dream a reality. Raju and two other

visionaries, Jay Reddy, CEO of Pro-Logic Inc., and Joe Swiger, past president of North American Drillers, have each donated \$250,000 — a total of \$750,000 — toward this goal.

"We decided to put our money where our mouth is," Raju said. "So many children's eye problems can be prevented and treated if we catch them early and build this hospital."

The three made the announcement Saturday evening at a Pro-Logic employee holiday party.

Eye Foundation of America, said Reddy, also the president of the other money needed for the project will be raised from donations and grants. Reddy, 42, came to the United States from India as a student. He started with nothing and is now CEO of Pro-Logic Inc. based out of Farmington, he said. The company has nine offices across the country and employs 300 people.

"I came from a very modest upbringing, and when you combine that with my desire to help people to see, I thought it just a natural for me to give back," he said. "I've been blessed with success in the United States. I believe eyes are the windows to the world. This is a way of opening up some new windows for thousands."

Swiger, 61, started having eye problems when he was 7 years old. The young boy had cataracts on his eyes that made it difficult to see. A native of Clarkstown, he traveled with his parents over back roads to seek care for a condition that usually afflicts senior citizens. Swiger said he had trouble learning to read, so his education was limited. He had to learn to do things with his hands. Years later, Swiger would become a successful businessman.

"I hope to keep kids from having the same problems that I did," he said. "You can't get a formal education if you can't see."

The children's hospital in India will be called Govrami — named for a river near where the hospital will be built. The hospital will replace a smaller clinic that has limited options for growth. The goal is for the hospital to be about 60,000 square feet and be able to serve 300 to 500 children per week.

"It is tough to attract top talent and expand our current facility or have the room needed to expand our research to world-class standards," Reddy said.

This is not Raju's first foray into building a hospital. In 1988, Raju spearheaded the construction of the Sri Krnan Eye Institute, located in India.

Raju travels extensively between India and Morgantown every year. "I leave home and go home and leave home from there and come home — all to give the gift of sight to those living in darkness," he said.

This hospital serves primarily 500 adults a week and has trained countless eye-care physicians to treat patients all over the world.

"What we can't do as an individual, collectively we can do anything," Raju said. "I do this. I am motivated to help others because I want to give something of myself. And this is what I can do to make the world a better place. There is an old adage, 'If you want to change something, you be the change — no matter how small it is.'"

