

▶ Service project:

# Giving hope to sick children

Bob Reeders of GELITA Medical plays Cliniclown

**GELITA Medical operates in more than 60 countries. The company thus has a lot of interaction with surgeons and patients. However, one group of patients is always special: children, especially those with cancer. For Bob Reeders, Business Development Manager at GELITA Medical, this was a very good reason to cheer these children up and to bring some fun and variety into their lives.**

Bob Reeders has to travel for GELITA Medical, working with its Distributors. During his visits to Latin America, he was much affected by seeing the many impoverished children there who often have to survive without parents. A number of years ago, he started a project for these children, so they could receive presents at Christmas that bring them some happiness. One way of achieving this was for Bob to take on a "job" in the hospital – as the resident hospital clown.

Through his work in Latin America, he was regularly in contact with Dr. Olga Lucia

Aristizabal, Director and Pediatric specialist of the Colsubsidio Pediatric Hospital one of the largest pediatric hospitals. Together with Julia, the Head Nurse, they bought 40 soft toys for those children undergoing treatment for cancer. These children have to have chemotherapy for illnesses such as leukemia and other kinds of aggressive tumors, and often feel very sick. "A stuffed toy helps to divert them from their sickness, so that they can feel like ordinary children for a little while," says Bob.

"During the holidays, it is even more difficult for the children to be in the hospital," he continues. That's why we wanted to do something for them, especially on New Year's Day. And so the hospital project was developed. The theme we selected was 'Feliz en Esperanza,' Spanish for 'Happiness and Hope.'

Julia and Bob then went into the oncology ward dressed up as the clowns Esperanza and Feliz. Mauricio Alvarez provided musical accompaniment. The children were carried along in a story they had thought out. "We were lost in a zoo and couldn't find the way out. We read them a story about a crazy jungle where a monkey washes the unwashed pelts of various animals, but doesn't pay attention and some of the pelts are switched by acci-

dent. Imagine an elephant in a giraffe costume and a hippopotamus in a tiger skin." The children then helped us to find the right pelts for the animals and the way out of the zoo, in this way they were able to let go of reality for a while and forget their pain and sadness.

"It was wonderful to see them so happy. I hope that this will bring them more strength and hope to fight their disease."

Bob Reeders' personal experience strengthens him in this. Even if he works for a medical company, he knows that medicine has its limits. "Fifteen years ago, I underwent an operation to remove a tumor from my spine and the support of others was absolutely essential to me during the healing process. They gave me happiness and hope, which in turn gave me the willpower to fight. At the end of the day, it is always about what people can do for each other. That's one of the great things about working at GELITA Medical. We are of course all very busy making a success of the business, but at the same time we are helping people to get better. This is the combination that makes me feel good doing my job," summarizes Bob. 🍌

