

jersey's **helping** hands

A foundation built on love

BY MICHELE HOWE
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

More than 40 years ago, Eva Gottscho turned a personal tragedy into a gift of life for others, going on to work tirelessly to help children with kidney disease.

In 1960, she and her now-late husband, Ira, lost their 15-year-old daughter, Ruth, to kidney failure. At the time of Ruth's death, long-term dialysis treatment was relatively new, and machines were scarce. So the couple began raising money to purchase hemodialysis machines for patients to use in their homes.

"It wasn't until she passed away, we learned there was a doctor who had come up with a dialysis machine," said the Short Hills

resident. "When people asked us what they could do to help us, my husband said 'Nothing. Just give me money so we can purchase dialysis machines for others to use.'"

Eventually, the couple, along with a few friends, established the Ruth Gottscho Kidney Foundation, a state wide, non profit that assists end-stage kidney patients, especially transplant recipients or those on dialysis. The foundation also helps with the cost of medications and transportation to and from treatments.

In the early days, from 1960 to 1973, the foundation raised enough money to purchase dialysis machines for more than 200 individuals to use in their homes. However, Congress passed a bill in 1973 that mandated the feder-

al government to assume 80 percent of dialysis costs, curtailing the need for home-based machines.

So the foundation redirected its energy and money into establishing pediatric dialysis units in hospitals, said Gottscho. The first was Newark Beth Israel Medical Center.

The organization opened a second unit at Holy Name Hospital in Teaneck and made gifts of equipment to help establish additional renal units in other parts of the state.

"Afterwards, we began looking for other ways to help and someone came up with the idea of a summer camp," said Gottscho.

The idea struck a chord, Gottscho said, because she remembered times when her

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JERRY MCCREA/THE STAR-LEDGER

Eva Gottscho, who founded the Ruth Gottscho Kidney Foundation, at her offices in Union.

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daughter could only watch as her friends went off to play or to camp in the summer. "She never complained, but the image of her looking out the window watching them remained with me. I knew I had to do something for other children," she said.

After two years of researching several camp programs, the foundation formed a partnership with

the Frost Valley YMCA in Montclair.

"In 1975, we built a small building with a dialysis unit attached to the wellness center at their summer camp in Claryville, N.Y., allowing youngsters with renal disease to enjoy a camping experience for up to two weeks at a time," Gottscho said.

The Ruth Gottscho Dialysis Center is fully equipped with kidney machines and all the medical supplies and equipment required to care for kidney patients. The foundation's center is affiliated with the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, a division of Montefiore Hospital and Medical Center, and

employs a full-time staff of doctors, nurses, and a technician, to oversee the unit at all times.

"Children, age 8 to 17, from anywhere in the country are eligible to attend. The thing I'm proudest of is that they are mainstreamed with healthy youngsters and take part in all the typical activities like swimming, hiking and fishing," she added.

Since its inception, between 1,200 and 1,400 children have been able to attend the summer camp, and no one is refused for lack of funds.

The foundation's primary source of funding comes from individual donations.

"We receive some small corporate donations, but mostly it's individuals like a woman who used to send a check for \$10,000. Now that she's passed away, her daughter sends us a check for \$5,000," Gottscho said.

This year, 52 youngsters attended the camp, which costs the foundation about \$70,000 a season to operate.

"Every little bit helps," she says.

Donations should be made payable to the Ruth Gottscho Kidney Foundation, 7 W. Beechcroft Road, Short Hills, N.J. 07078. Further information on the organization can be obtained by logging onto www.rgkf.org.