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# SPREADING SMILES

*With a focus on philanthropy, plastic surgeon  
Paul Gardner is changing lives with his magic touch*

Whether treating his patients with caring expertise locally or during medical missions overseas, Naples plastic surgeon Paul Gardner, MD, has repeatedly distinguished himself as a “top doctor” by patients, peers, and the community.

Distinction in Castle Connolly’s America’s Top Doctors and other industry honors reflect Gardner’s dedication and skills, which he first honed as a medical student at the University of Florida and as an attending surgeon working with children and veterans for a dozen years in Birmingham, Alabama.

At Gardner Plastic Surgery, which he opened in 2006, Gardner emphasizes discrete, natural-looking outcomes in rejuvenating facial, breast, and body enhancements. “I don’t try to change how a person looks; I just turn back the clock,” he says. “The biggest compliment is always when my patients are told, ‘Oh, you look great. Did you lose weight? Did you change your hair?’ Something is different but their friends or coworkers just can’t tell what it is. That is the art of plastic surgery.”

Gardner also finds fulfillment in the impact he’s made for at least 20 years on medical mission trips with Operation Smile, one of many charitable causes Gardner and his wife, Amy, a pediatric nurse, support. The Virginia-based organization has provided hundreds of thousands of surgeries on cleft lips and cleft palates in more than 80 countries since its founding in 1982.

“We’ll go into an area and treat 150 kids in a week and change their lives permanently,” explains Gardner, who chose Operation Smile over other medical mission organizations because of the expertise, efficiency, and follow-up care it provides. “[Operation Smile] gets there a full year in advance of the mission and sets up the infrastructure. Everything is set up, even the promotion of the mission, so that there are patients who come from all over the country. You’re able to do quite a bit in a short amount time.”

Only the highest-priority candidates, usually kids who have not previously been treated, are selected from among the 400 to 500 people who routinely seek help, Gardner says. But on several occasions, Gardner has found ways to help those turned away, often adults. In one such case, Gardner and his wife, who used to join him on medical missions before the birth of their two children, treated a man in his 20s under local anesthesia after Operation Smile had completed its scheduled surgeries.

“He had been doing fine, but he had never kissed a girl, and his goal was to get kissed,” Gardner recalls. “He lay there very stoically, and we fixed his lip. It was amazing.” —*Seth Soffian*

Dr. Paul Gardner

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