As President of the National Police Defense Foundation (NPDF), retired Det. 2nd Grade Jack Holder works hard for the welfare of children all over the globe. With six grandchildren of his own you might say he has a vested interest. Naturally, having dedicated 20 years of his life to the NYPD he is no stranger to helping others and after working nine of those years in OCCB, and then retiring out of the Queens DA Squad in 1985, he made a smooth transition into undercover work at JFK airport upon his retirement. It was then that Jack Holder met Joseph Occhipinti, the man who would later found the NPDF and lure Jack into the fold as a polygraph expert investigating cases for cops.

In addition to offering legal support to its members, the Foundation got its start by offering programs like Operation Kids and Safe Cop. Operation Kids is a fingerprint program for children that every family should be a part of. It also contributes to national searches for missing children by posting periodic rewards. Safe Cop is another reward based program, offering payments of up to $10,000 for public information leading to the arrest and conviction of those who shoot NPDF members. To date, the foundation has made half a dozen partial payments and one full payment in the interest of its members. The legal support offered by the NPDF protects its members from court cases based on fabricated allegations and has been credited with exposing many of these injustices on national television.

In 1995 Det. Holder became president of the NPDF. However, it was only just about two years ago at a law enforcement convention, that he would play an integral part in the Foundation’s mission statement taking a new turn. At the convention he was approached by a distraught woman who spoke of her critically ill granddaughter in Ecuador. Holder was inspired to action by this story of a child in dire need of a heart operation unavailable in her own country, and given a mere 15 days to live. He utilized the Foundation’s resources to cut through the red tape surrounding a travel visa for the child and was able to arrange for her to receive a life saving operation.

That happy ending was the first, but as of today seven critically ill children from countries lacking the facilities to save them have been given the Gift of Life. In addition to Ecuador these countries include Colombia, Honduras and the Dominican Republic. In fact, enough word has spread about the fledgling program that politicians and medical professionals from countries lacking facilities for difficult cases know they can contact the Foundation for help.

The NPDF’s latest mission of mercy involves a two-year-old boy from the Dominican Republic. In dire need of a cochlea transplant to avert the developmental issues facing deaf children, his operation is pending.

Now, just over a decade old, the NPDF boasts a national enrollment of 42,000 members, 1,000 of which are active or retired NYPD officers and included in that number are a dozen or so working directly with the Foundation itself. Detective Holder’s latest initiative is a program called Project Pedophile. This program acts as a safety screen targeting the criminal element attempting to victimize children via the Internet. Embedded Project Pedophile investigators impersonating children enter chat rooms to ensnare pedophiles. The program also offers a $1,000 scholarship to encourage kids with information regarding their personal encounters with pedophiles to overcome their fear and come forward.

During the interview, Det. Holder proudly talked about his four children, Christopher and Barbara (as well as her husband Al) who have followed his footsteps into civil service; and Debbie and Andrew, both thriving in the private sector. He is equally proud of his grandchildren, who have been an inspiration for his work. No doubt they look back proudly upon him, at the lives he helps to save and his daily work to make the world a safer place for kids and police officers everywhere.
"Nothing could prepare me for that first trip to Kosovo (in the former Yugoslavia). The mass grave sites, demolished buildings and utter devastation of the country was shocking," said retired Agency Attorney Fernando Ortiz, Jr., formerly assigned to the Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Legal Matters. He is now the Legal Officer at the Civilian Police Division/Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the United Nations Secretariat where he provides advice on legal, political and administrative matters. He also collaborates with different United Nations (U.N.) missions and offices to develop mission-level policy and strategy in the areas of peacekeeping and field operations.

Ortiz had no plans on leaving the NYPD in 1999, but when he was offered the position of Judicial Affairs Officer at the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) he leapt at the opportunity. He became the first person and only Latino to serve in the position at the UNMIK, a post established by the U.N. Security Council to help prepare Kosovo for elections and eventual self-government. In many ways, Ortiz’s NYPD roots in legal issues involving law enforcement personnel and “public service through the law” prepared him for his role at the U.N.

At the UNMIK, Ortiz was responsible for constructing a law enforcement system in Kosovo. He helped establish a local judicial system including a Supreme Court, five District Courts, and a Municipal and Commercial Court. In addition, he appointed court judges, and prosecutors, and provided legal advice to the UNMIK.

“Life in the South Bronx wasn’t easy,” said the native New Yorker who was born on the Lower Eastside and raised in the South Bronx. “But I learned valuable survival skills that I continue to rely on to this day. My parents worked very hard to take care of their children, and instilled in us the value of a college education.” Sadly, it was the sudden death of Ortiz’s younger brother that shattered his family, and became a turning point for him to seek a better life.

Upon his acceptance to Columbia University in 1975, Ortiz thrust himself into his studies and the college community. He joined student councils and participated in a variety of activities, and eventually became the first Latino to hold the title of Vice President of the Columbia College Alumni Association’s Outreach Committee. He was also instrumental in establishing a mentor program which pairs prominent minority graduates with minority students, and is still very much involved with the association.

After graduating from Columbia in 1979, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science, Ortiz pursued his Master’s in Spanish Literature and Language at New York University (NYU) in Madrid, Spain. He returned to the United States and entered NYU School of Law on a full scholarship as a Root-Tilden National Merit Scholar. At the time, he was one of ten students in the country to receive the prestigious award.

It was while attending NYU Law School that Ortiz interned at the U.N. as an Institute for Training and Research Fellow. “That internship made me realize that I wanted to bring about immediate results to make a difference in people’s lives. It’s what prompted me to work for the NYPD. There was an increasing need for police to be better trained and equipped, and I saw myself helping the Department achieve that goal,” Ortiz said.

In 1985, he joined the NYPD as an assistant advocate and was assigned to the Department Advocate’s Office. Several years later, he was assigned to the Civilian Complaint Review Board (when it was under the realm of the NYPD) as a chief investigator. In 1996, Ortiz was appointed an agency attorney and assigned to the newly-created Disciplinary Assessment Unit (DAU). The unit was responsible for implementing reforms to the disciplinary process that took place from 1995 to 1996.

In March, Ortiz packed his bags, said goodbye to his wife, Ofelia Haydee, and their two children, Christine Gabriella, 16, a student at the Bronx High School of Science, and Fernando III, 13, who will be attending Archbishop Molloy High School this fall, and returned to Kosovo. His mission: to assess the peacekeeping mission’s civilian police component’s readiness to conform to the UNMIK mandates.

“I’ve had the honor and good fortune of working under two Nobel Peace Prize winners. U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, winner of the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize; and Dr. Bernard Kouchner, the head of the UNMIK and co-founder of the international non-governmental organization Doctors Without Borders, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999.

“There have been many NYPD and U.N. mentors in my life,” states Ortiz. “Both organizations gave me a tremendous opportunity to do what I’ve always wanted to do. Help and give back. What more can I say? I’m enjoying this immensely.”

BY PrAA CHERYL SMITH