

Long Island
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DR. RACHEL A. RUOTOLO, MD

PEDIATRIC, PLASTIC AND CRANIOFACIAL SURGEON
 LONG ISLAND PLASTIC SURGICAL GROUP

By LISA MORRIS JOSEFAK

Born nine weeks premature, Isabella Gaviola's gastro organs were formed on the outside of her body, a rare birth defect known as omphalocele.

Her parents, Charles and Rebecca, consulted with highly regarded surgeons, but were disappointed with the procedures each had presented to correct Isabella's condition. But after meeting Dr. Rachel A. Ruotolo, a pediatric, plastic and craniofacial surgeon at Long Island Plastic Surgical Group in Garden City, the Dix Hills couple left her office with a brighter outlook.

"Finding Dr. Ruotolo was like finding a needle in a haystack," said Charles Gaviola, who explained that Dr. Ruotolo was the only doctor who understood the couple's concerns

about using foreign materials to keep the organs inside Isabella, who also suffers from multiple allergies.

"Dr. Ruotolo came up with the idea of using Isabella's own skin," Gaviola said. The two-part surgery first included a procedure that helped Isabella's own tissue expand. Once this was complete, Dr. Ruotolo was able to use Isabella's own skin to keep her organs safely in place. Never performed on a small child, Dr. Ruotolo's avant-garde surgery was a great success.

This type of situation is all in a day's work for Dr. Ruotolo, who originally set out to become a professional ballerina. But her passion for dance was left in the wings when her love for the sciences took center stage. Today, she is the only Long Island plastic surgeon whose practice is exclu-

sively dedicated to specializing in pediatric craniofacial procedures to repair birth deformities.

Dr. Ruotolo joined Long Island Plastic Surgical Group in 2008, focusing on repairing cleft lip and palate, protruding ears, syndactyly (fused digits) and craniosynostosis (premature closure of skull sutures, which curtails brain growth and results in abnormal head and facial shape).

One of the most satisfying moments for Dr. Ruotolo is seeing the effect on the child's family when he or she is brought out of surgery.

"Some parents just fall down and cry and hug you," she said.

"Kids who are old enough and who can talk to me come to me after surgery and say they are not teased anymore," Dr. Ruotolo noted. "They smile now, whereas they didn't smile before. It is exceptionally rewarding to have them come into my office and see how they now carry themselves and how they are all chit-chatty and confident."

Dr. Ruotolo also specializes in facial trauma resulting from a playground accident, a car accident, altercations or sports injuries. Her presence on Long Island provides accessibility for accident victims at area hospitals, who no longer have to be transported to New York City for surgery.

As an extension of her passion and vigilance for children, Dr. Ruotolo holds a position on the board of Child Abuse and Protective Services for Long Island.

In an effort to help other countries take care of their own, Dr. Ruotolo schedules yearly trips abroad. She has volunteered and shared her expertise with the victims of the 2010 Haiti earthquake and has helped provide healthcare for children in Southeast Asia through "Project Vietnam."

"These experiences are phenomenal – it is always an educational process," she said.

Dr. Ruotolo is board certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery and is affiliated with the North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System through the Steven and Alexandra Cohen Children's Medical Center and the Hagedorn Cleft Palate and Craniofacial Center. She also has privileges at Winthrop University Hospital in Mineola and Good Samaritan Hospital in West Islip.