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New doctor in Austin makes it possible for Haitian boy, other kids to get hearts fixed here

By [Mary Ann Roser](#) | Thursday, January 8, 2009, 01:05 PM

A 3-year-old boy from Haiti is expected to get his heart fixed here next week, thanks to big-hearted donors, volunteers and a cardiac specialist who has moved to Austin.

The boy is Luidgy Mackionvy Virgile, and he is being taken care of and hosted here — entirely free of charge — with his mom.



Luidgy's visit is courtesy of HeartGift, an Austin nonprofit that provides heart surgeries to needy children from around the world. It raises money, arranges the visits and works with doctors and hospitals to provide the care. "I bet it takes 250 volunteers to support one child's surgery," HeartGift Executive Director Lisa Rodman said.

Rodman says HeartGift can now bring children like Luidgy to Austin since Dr. Arnold Fenrich arrived in August from Grand Rapids, Mich. Fenrich is Austin's first pediatric electrophysiologist, a doctor who specializes in children's heartbeat or rhythm abnormalities, Rodman said.



Luidgy is believed to have an atrial flutter and a hole in his heart that is causing a rapid heartbeat. Fenrich plans to evaluate Luidgy early next week and decide whether to proceed with making tiny burns in the heart to stop the abnormal rhythms. If everything looks the way Fenrich expects, Luidgy will have the procedure in the cardiac catheterization lab (the cath lab) at Dell Children's Medical Center.

Before Fenrich came, HeartGift could not bring to Austin a child needing the kind of care Luidgy requires, Rodman said. Local children would go to larger cities like Dallas and Houston for treatment, said Fenrich, who spent 18 years at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston.

As an electrophysiologist, Fenrich also implants pacemakers and defibrillators in kids.

Fenrich said he was glad to donate his services to Luidgy, who will be hosted by a French-speaking family, the Colantonios of Austin, during his weeks-long stay in Austin. (French is Luidgy's native language, and the Colantonios will be on hand to translate for doctors' visits and anything the boy and his Mom need.)

"I'm happy to do what I can, not only to help this child from Haiti, but all the children from the area," Fenrich said. "One of the most gratifying things I can do is go out from the cath lab and tell the parents, 'Your child is fixed and cured and should be able to lead a normal