

THE SYRACUSE POST STANDARD

Back in Service

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An iron lung machine that kept Central New York polio victims alive in the 1940s and 1950s is being pressed back into service as part of a campaign to eradicate polio in Third World countries.

SUNY Upstate Medical University is loaning the 7-foot-long, 500-pound device to Rotary District 7150, which will use it as part of a fund-raising effort. Rotary International is trying to raise \$80 million to wipe out polio. Rotary clubs in Central New York have pledged \$328,400 toward the goal. They will display the iron lung at shopping malls throughout the region.

The iron lung was originally used in the former Silverman Hospital, now known as Silverman Hall at Upstate. Hospitals stopped using the machines in the late 1950s after a polio vaccine was developed.

Two years ago, students in Upstate's Department of Cardiorespiratory Sciences took the machine out of storage and restored it.

"This may be the last one in Central New York," said Joseph Morfei, department chairman.

The highly contagious polio virus is spread by contact with contaminated feces or oral secretions. Children are most vulnerable. The virus inflames nerves in the brain and spinal cord, causing paralysis of the muscles in the chest, legs or arms.

In 1950, 33,300 people in the United States were stricken. Polio patients with chest paralysis were placed inside iron lung machines, which exerted a push-pull motion on the chest.

Today, hospitals use mechanical ventilators to help patients breathe.

While polio has been wiped out in developed countries, it's still a problem in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Angola, Congo, Somalia and Sudan. Rotary launched a program called PolioPlus in 1985 to deliver polio vaccine to affected areas. The number of polio cases worldwide has been cut dramatically; the group's goal is to eradicate the disease by 2005.