At 7:30 on a Tuesday morning, the fourth-floor hallway of Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh is quiet, save for the occasional brisk passage of a nurse or the hum of medical machinery. Then, an elevator door opens and a man in a worn, yellow button-down shirt pushes a waist-high tool cart into the hallway. His lived-in sneakers shuffle eagerly forward as he reaches for the rubber bulb of the bicycle horn mounted on his cart. When its sudden staccato blast echoes down the corridors, heads poke out of doorways, and faces light up at the sight of Albert Lexie, the shoe shiner.

Every Tuesday and Thursday, Lexie, 63, awakens at 5 a.m. and catches two buses from his hometown of Monessen to Children’s Hospital. He has been shining shoes here since 1981. (His initial price was $2 a pair; now it’s $3.) Without fail, he donates all of his tips to the Free Care Fund, a charity that ensures all pediatric patients receive medical care regardless of their ability to pay. (Lexie started saving tips in the hopes that he could make a big gift and meet the late news anchor Patti Burns, who hosted the KDKA telethon for Children’s. More than 20 years after he met Burns, he keeps donating.) So far, he has given almost $100,000.

Staff members from the pediatric surgery department greet Lexie warmly as his cart, a gym bag full of supplies, and lines up the shoes. Barefoot employees gather around like children at an ice cream truck. Someone puts a fresh bagel and cup of coffee on the cart for Lexie. He’s full of childlike joy, with a sizable grin and large spectacles pressed tightly against his head.

“He’s the only one I’ve ever known who could get all that salt off my shoes,” notes Aileen Sanders, business manager for pediatric surgery.

Lexie buffs a pair of black flats that belong to Sanders while empathizing with her, saying, “You’ve got to work harder now, since you’ve got a new daughter now.”

Later, as he slips one hand inside a black wing tip, he says, “This makes me very happy to see lots of nice people, lots of nice customers.” He turns the shoe from side to side, quickly rubbing the surface with saddle soap. “Shoes got to take a bath, just like people got to take a bath,” he says without taking his eyes off the shoe.

Although his daily average is 15 pairs—a day’s earnings of just $45—Lexie donates his tips not just from Children’s, but also from days shining shoes downtown and in the business districts of the Mon Valley. He puts out cans for donations in area business districts of the Mon Valley. He puts out cans for donations in area business districts of the Mon Valley.

Sanders checks his coffee to make sure it hasn’t gotten cold. She says that Lexie demonstrates that “you don’t have to have a lot of money to give a lot of money.” Today he charges just $2 per pair of shoes—a special that he offers annually the week before his birthday. Despite the reduced price, he will still eagerly donate every tip.

Aileen Sanders, business manager for pediatric surgery.

Lexie pushes his cart to the back of the office, where he finds a seat, unpacks a blue backpack full of supplies, and lines up the shoes. Barefoot employees gather around like children at an ice cream truck. Someone puts a fresh bagel and cup of coffee on the cart for Lexie. He’s full of childlike joy, with a sizable grin and large spectacles pressed tightly against his head.

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