

People

ALL-STAR
AMONG US



"It's like he's still here, encouraging me," Richard says of Emilio, "because other families need our help." (In van: Cancer patients Elier Resendiz, 11, and Amy Cisneros, 10.)

LIFESAVING RIDES FOR SICK KIDS

Richard Nares, 56

San Diego

Married at 40, Richard and Diane Nares never expected to have a child. Then came Emilio. "It was," Richard says, "the time of our life." But their bliss was cut short when, at 5, the little boy who loved nature walks and Winnie the Pooh died in his parents' arms after a more than two-year battle with leukemia. Even in grief, the couple couldn't forget the families of limited means they'd met during Emilio's illness who had to take their sick kids on two-hour bus rides for treatment at Rady Children's Hospital. Inspired to help, Richard, an artist, began driving needy families to the hospital in his old Buick; in 2003 he and Diane, a sales manager, founded the Emilio Nares Foundation (emilionaresfoundation.org). Today, with two vans and a full-time driver, the nonprofit

provides approximately 2,000 free trips a year, says Richard, whose work is so inspiring that he was chosen to be one of 30 everyday heroes honored by PEOPLE and Major League Baseball's All-Stars Among Us campaign.

"It's necessary to get kids here on schedule for their treatments," says Rady's Dr. William Roberts. "This has been really important." Luz Quiroga and her son Martin, then 6, took the van for six months in 2003, after Martin's bone-marrow transplant. "I'd take that time to be attentive to my child, or even nap—it meant the world to me," says Quiroga, 45, adding her son is doing better. For leukemia patient Elier Resendiz, 11, whose mom has no car, the van—which always has Spanish music playing—is just plain fun. "I love it," he says. And that's all Richard needs to hear. "This," he says, "is healing."

By Elaine Aradillas

Please tune in to the 2009 MLB All-Star Game in St. Louis on July 14 live on FOX at 8pm ET.