

VITAL SIGNS

EDITED BY PHIL MINTZ

Before And After

It brings to mind a sweet picture: a cute little boy with ears that stick out, much like Opie on "The Andy Griffith Show."

But to the little boy named Scott, and others like him, it was that marked feature that made him different from the other children. And to a child, different is never sweet.

To illustrate that point, Scott and other children will be the featured artists at the Long Island Children's Museum in Garden City this month. The drawings are being exhibited by Dr. Frederick Lukash, a Manhasset-based reconstructive and plastic surgeon.

In his practice, Lukash has typically asked children too young to verbalize their feelings to draw pictures of themselves, sometimes before and after their surgery. An artist himself, Lukash knows the benefits of self-expression through pictures.

"For a child, it's an ice-breaker. When they come

to my office, they have something to bring me," Lukash explains. "And it's a way for them to communicate their feelings about the surgery when they don't know how to verbalize it."

Oddly enough, many pictures reveal not so much the immedi-

ate problem that brings the boy or girl to the operating table, but their fear of the upcoming surgery

itself. Just as telling is how the self-portraits show wide, happy grins after the surgeries. (One

boy drew a picture of a happy face, with the words, "I'm free.")

"Kids bounce back immediately," Lukash says. "All they want is to get back to the playground."

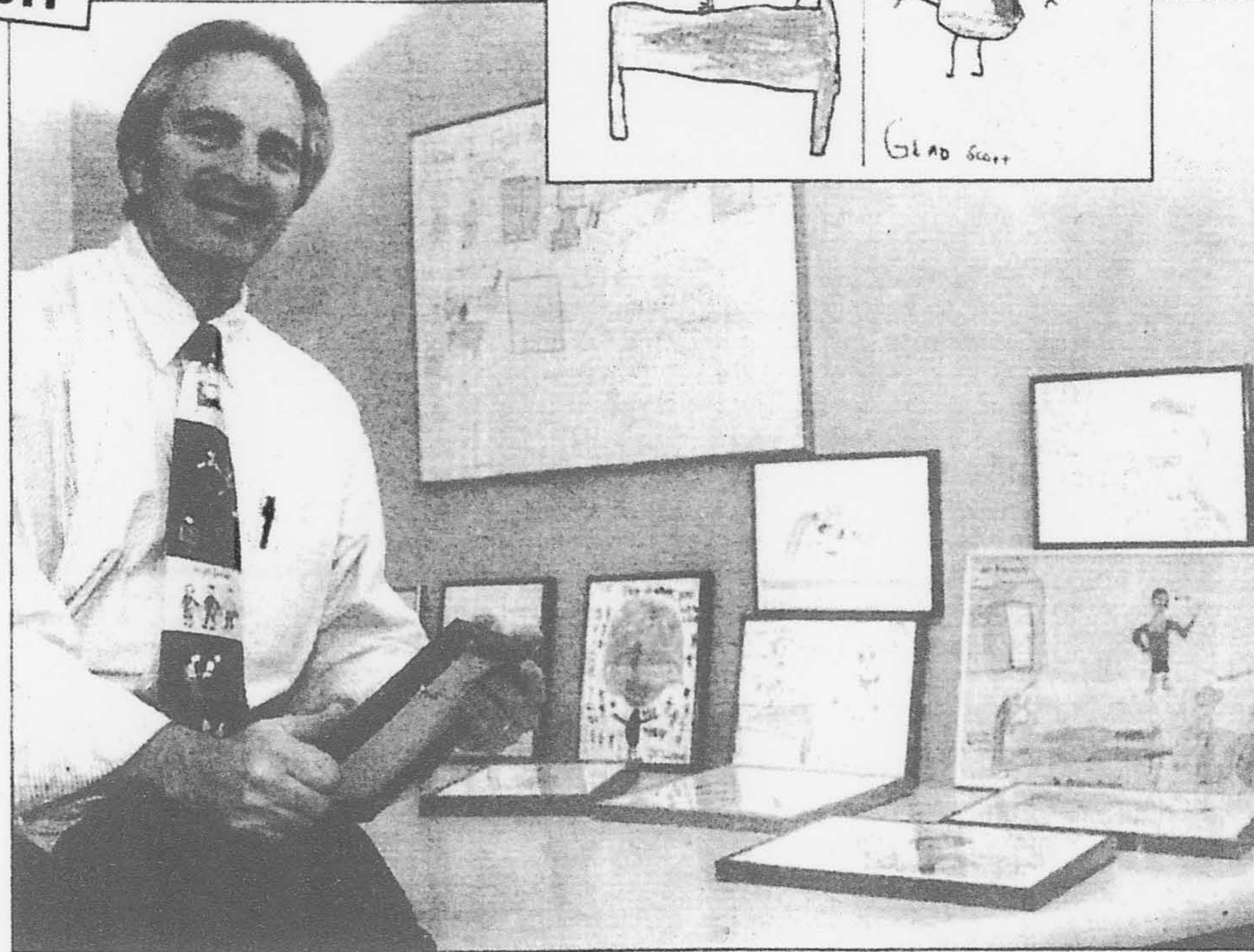
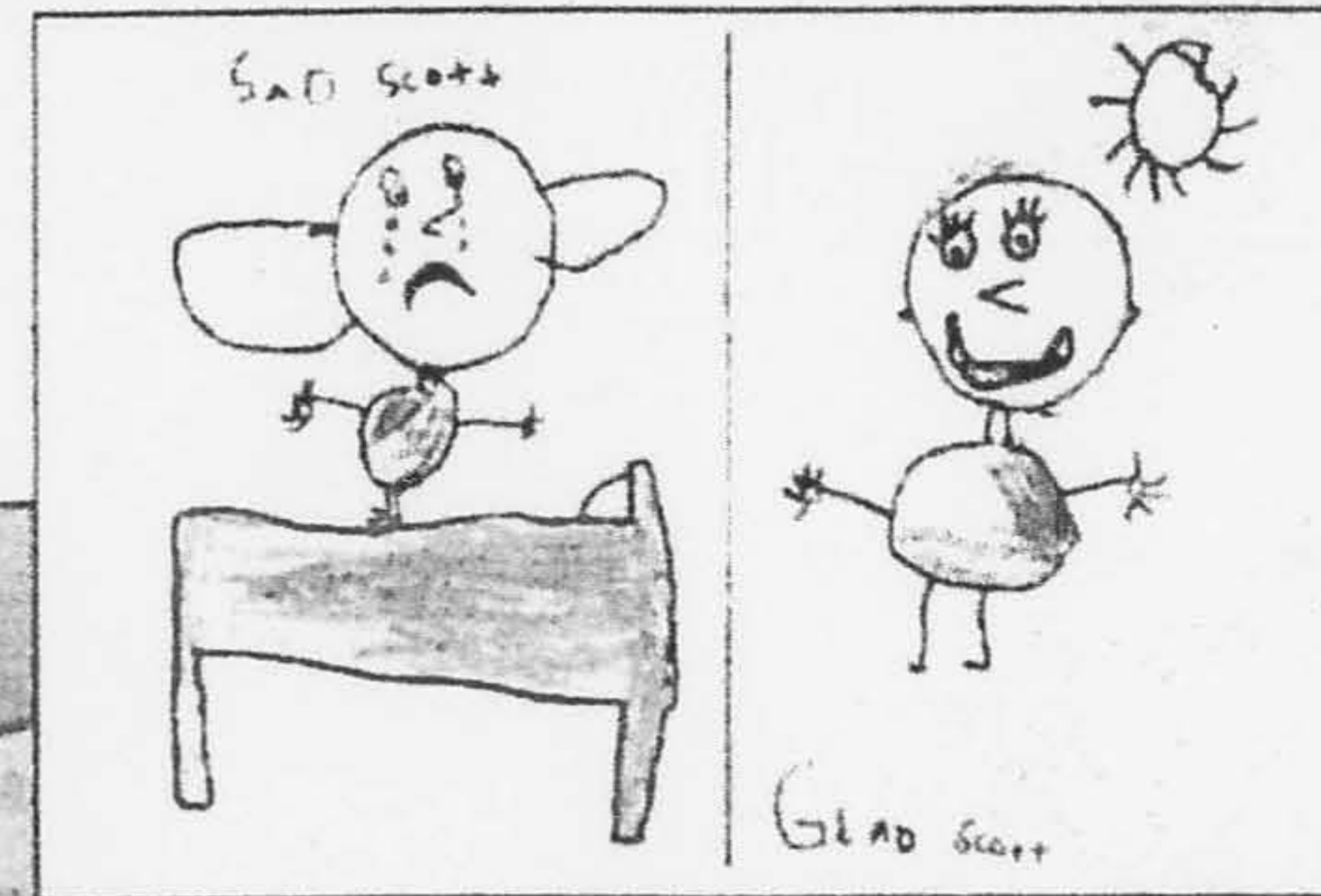
The plastic surgeon's work of 25 years has included the repair of severe deformities such as a cleft lip and palate or a missing earlobe, usually done on a young infant or toddler. Along with his local practice, he has worked overseas with humanitarian organizations such as "Operation Smile."

Lukash says children can benefit from seeing the show, which runs through Oct. 31 at the Children's Museum, 550 Stewart Ave., Garden City.

"They will come away from the exhibit saying, 'after [surgery] is happy,'" says Lukash, who is pleased he found an avenue for his labor of love. "All 'after surgery' pictures are positive images. Not one unhappy drawing in the whole lot."

— Stacey Altherr

EXHIBIT



Drawings by young patients of Dr. Lukash, shown here in his office, are on display at the Long Island Children's Museum.

Newsday Photo / Dick Yarwood