

Breathing life into a good cause

London Cypriot plans to walk the Troodos range to raise awareness for children with breathing difficulties

By Alexia Saoulli

WITH ALMOST one in five Cypriot infants suffering from at least one bronchospasm before the age of six, one London Cypriot has set out to turn the tables on breathing difficulties.

John Michael Mouskos plans to cross 600 kilometres of the Troodos mountain range to raise awareness for the establishment of a state-of-the-art Lung Centre for children in Nicosia.

The Breathing Life Trust was formed in London by Mouskos to provide personal and financial support to help children with respiratory and breathing difficulties. "As part of its first campaign, the Trust aims to establish The Breathing Life Lung Centre for Children in Cyprus, as there is currently no medical centre for treating lung diseases in children on the island," Mouskos, 40, told the *Cyprus Mail*.

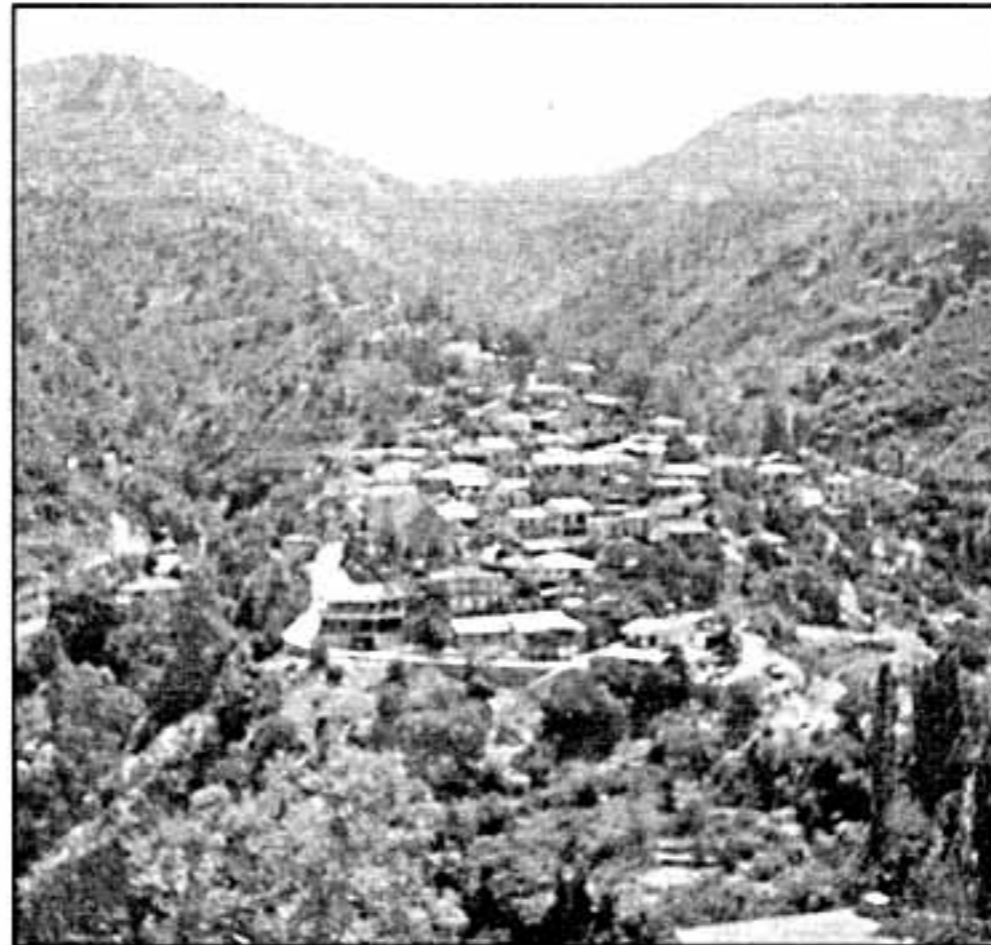
According to Makarios hospital's paediatric pulmonologist Dr Panayiotis Yiallourous, respiratory diseases are responsible for the largest part of sickness and mortality in childhood, equalling the severity of cardiovascular diseases in adults.

Yiallourous said asthma was the

most frequent chronic disease in Cypriot children, to the extent that it appeared to be taking on epidemic proportions. Its frequency was recently found to affect eight to 11 per cent of the total number of school age children in the Nicosia district and six per cent in Limassol. In addition, it appears that one out of every five pre-school age children report at least one or more episodes of bronchospasm and wheezing before the age of six, said Yiallourous.

He said infections such as pneumonia, bronchitis and bronchiolitis also made up a large portion of respiratory illnesses and that management of these infections during colder months created a significant burden on both the public and private health sector. A wide list of other rarer and more severe lung diseases such as Cystic Fibrosis, Bronchiectasis and other genetic syndromes represented additional requirements from public health services, he added.

"Since 1997 a Specialist Paediatric Pulmonology Clinic and Research Unit operates in Makarios hospital in Nicosia. This clinic operates as a referral centre for complex respiratory problems referred by both the public and private health sector from all over Cyprus. Demand for the services of the clinic year by year seems to be



increasing.

Yiallourous added: "55 per cent of the admissions of newborn babies on the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Makarios hospital relate to the severe respiratory difficulties whereas 28 per cent of the admissions on the Children's Intensive Care Unit of the hospital are for severe lung disease or complications which constitute the

leading cause for admission on the unit."

That is why Mouskos and Yiallourous believe the establishment of a lung centre at Makarios hospital will make a great difference to the quality of children's lives throughout the island as it would be operate as a fully equipped state-of-the-art respiratory research and treatment cen-

tre.

The Breathing Life Trust also intends to provide lung function equipment to all district hospitals on the island and fund several research projects into child respiratory illness.

The funding for such a project is estimated at £200,000, of which £44,000 has already been raised. The remaining amount will be raised by events both in London and in Cyprus.

The Trust will be launched on April 15 and 22 in London and will include an exhibition of photographs by Reno Widson, Doros Partasides and Michael Eleftheriades and the showing of a film 'Breathing Life: A Journey to Mount Everest' which includes a collection of poems by Mouskos which were inspired by his visit to the Himalayan mountains.

Mouskos said: "To understand the isolation, fear and emotion experienced by a child with breathing difficulties, I journeyed to the high altitude mountains of the Himalayas, into thin air through shades of danger and changing landscapes to discover, that of all of life's simple pleasures breathing freely is by far the most precious."

He added: "As a focal point to the fund raising campaign a 600 km mountain charity walk will start on May 1 and will last for 23 days. The charity walk will cross the Troodos mountain range and pass through many remote villages including my own of Lemithou." The event will also give profile to a National Asthma Campaign organised by the Breathing Life Trust.