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# news release

4300 Marsh Ridge Road • Suite 114 • Carrollton, TX 75010  
972.267.1111 • 972.267.3535 (fax) • [www.alarryross.com](http://www.alarryross.com)

**FOR INFORMATION, CONTACT:**  
Melany Ethridge 972.267.1111  
[melany@alarryross.com](mailto:melany@alarryross.com)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Changing Lives through Mobility: Wheels for the World program gives hope to those with disabilities**

**AGOURA HILLS, Calif., Dec. 20, 2010** – [Joni and Friends International Disability Center](#) has for 16 years been changing the lives of those affected by disabilities around the world by showing the love of Christ through the gift of mobility.

Altogether, by the end of 2010, Joni and Friends will have distributed 65,000 wheelchairs to those in need around the world. But more importantly, as founder Joni Eareckson Tada will say, is the love shown and hope imparted to the recipient, his or her family and friends, and even throughout the community.

“In the developing world, a disability is often a death sentence,” Tada said. “At the least, if someone can’t walk, they are confined at home, can’t go to school and can’t work. A wheelchair costs more than a year’s wages, so the disabled person and his or her family have no hope for a better life.

“At the worst, many of these families will abandon a disabled infant or child because of the financial drain on the family,” Tada continued. “Many of the cultures even consider a disability a curse upon the family and will have the child put to death.”

The Joni and Friends Wheels for the World program has a goal to not only provide physical relief by supplying the wheelchair, but spiritual relief in helping the family – along with the entire community – understand the biblical truth about God’s heart, love, and esteem for people with disabilities. The Joni and Friends volunteers do more than provide the wheelchair – they make all the adjustments necessary to ensure a proper fit, educate the family on care and maintenance, instruct them in making future adjustments as necessary, advise them on preventative medicine, share God’s Word with them and counsel with them about spiritual and emotional needs in their families.

“While the numbers of wheelchairs we have provided is great, what warms my heart more than anything is hearing from our teams about the lives that have been infused with hope and with God’s love as a result of our team’s visit,” Tada said. “This is truly what our ministry is all about.”

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Another group affected by the ministry of Wheels for the World is prisoners who work to refurbish the wheelchairs the Joni and Friends volunteers will be delivering. Joni and Friends was “green” way before it was trendy, every year gathering thousands of wheelchairs that were outgrown, had missing or broken parts and were likely on their way to being discarded by American families. They ship the wheelchairs to several prisons around the country, where inmates have been trained in wheelchair repair and restoration, desiring to give back to society in this way.

“While those who are incarcerated are glad to have a way that they can make amends for their misdeeds by helping others, more than that, it is an education for them about the worth of their soul and the lives of others, as many of the inmates’ lives are also transformed as much as the eventual wheelchair recipient’s,” Tada said.

Wheels for the World began in 1994 with only a handful of trips to other countries, with a few hundred wheelchairs delivered, and has grown to encompass as many as 20 trips in a given year – with 25 planned for 2011 – and thousands of chairs provided. Now, the ministry is working to multiply its efforts by training churches with a heart for disability ministry to coordinate their own wheelchair deliveries.

“We’ve reached the pinnacle of what we as one ministry can manage in one year, but have streamlined the process and developed systems that are transferrable to others as a way to not only add to, but multiply what Joni and Friends is able to do by itself,” said Dan’l Markham, managing director of Joni and Friends Field Ministries, which administers the Wheels for the World program. “That’s a key priority for us here at Joni and Friends – equipping the Church to minister to those affected by disability – and it is exciting to see that happening through our Wheels for the World program.”

For more than 30 years Joni and Friends has worked to accelerate ministry to the disability community, offering a wide array of life-affirming ministries to people with disabilities around the world. Joni and Friends does this through the International Disability Center; the Christian Institute on Disability; international radio and television programs filled with inspirational stories; Wheels for the World, which every year sees thousands of individuals receive wheelchairs and the life-giving message of the Gospel; and Family Retreats held in the U.S. and around the world, where families affected by disability learn that they are not alone. More information can be found online at the ministry’s new website, [www.joniandfriends.org](http://www.joniandfriends.org).