

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

DAILY BRUIN

UCLA Health System workers amass change for a priceless cause in Operation Mend

UCLA Health System workers collect, donate Reagan Center fountain coins to help treat wounded soldiers

By [EMILY CHU](#)

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Tools



[Charlie Chang](#)

Senior Superintendent of Health System Facilities Robert Minich holds a stack of coins in front of the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. UCLA Health System Facilities collects coins in the fountain at the UCLA hospital and donates them to Operation Mend.

Robert Minich picked up a penny off the ground and dropped it back into the pail of coins he gripped in his hands.

“That’s a wish,” he said.

In his position as senior superintendent of UCLA Health System Facilities, Minich helps maintain the fountains outside of Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center – despite that not being part of his job description.

The maintenance for the fountains fell by the wayside when the hospital opened in 2008, so Minich started caring for them. He says he felt drawn to them.

“People go out there (to the fountains) to get away from their stress of having family members or loved ones in here,” he said.

In 2010, after two years of cleaning the fountain and collecting coins, Minich donated about \$900 to Operation Mend. This was right around the time of the hospital’s second anniversary.

“It’s amazing that all of these potential wishes would turn into something that would benefit this population of patients that really needs our help,” said Melanie Gideon, Operation Mend’s program manager.

Operation Mend is a program within UCLA’s hospital system that funds reconstruction surgeries for wounded service members from the Iraq or Afghanistan wars. The charity provides everything from housing to food and entertainment for the patients and their families while they are being cared for at UCLA.

After noticing all the coins accumulating from weekly fountain cleanings, Minich and his staff began collecting and keeping the coins in a container in his office.

Space soon became an issue.

“Coins were overflowing in my office,” he said, laughing.

Minich soon began looking for a way to use the coins. He brought up the topic in staff meetings, and several solutions arose. The staff briefly considered pocketing the coins or hosting a pizza party, but decided against it. To them, it was not just money.

“These coins have soul and meaning to somebody somewhere,” Minich said.

He thought donating the money to charity would do the coins and their wishes justice. The hospital regularly donates money from other small maintenance operations around the building, such as money generated from collecting scrap metal around the building.

Minich approached Ellen Schuster, the director of cashiering at the hospital, and asked for her opinion. She started thinking about charities to which they could donate the money.

“I read about Operation Mend on UCLA Medical Center’s website, and it sounded like a really great cause,” Schuster said. “I suggested it, and he liked the idea, so he went with that.”

Minich said he was happy to make the donation, regardless of the amount.

In Minich’s office, coins are still spilling out of their containers.

He said he might choose another charity in the future, but for now he will continue supporting Operation Mend. He will donate the coins from the fountain every two years, he said.

In just a few months, Minich will make the trip to Operation Mend once again to make another donation.