

## Plastic Surgeon Offers Cheap Injections to Pay for Cataract Surgeries in Africa

By Polly Summar  
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If you've ever been curious about getting Botox but were too embarrassed— or cheap— to check it out, here's your chance to do it for a good cause at a reduced rate.

Plastic surgeon Daniel N. Ronel is holding Botox fundraisers at his office in both Santa Fe and Albuquerque this week.

Here's how it works: You pay \$250 (a cut from his regular price of \$375), the pharmaceutical company Allergan donates the Botox, and Ronel gives the entire \$250 to Eyes of Africa Initiative of the One World Sight Project.

There will be no music, and no open bar at this fundraiser, though.

"I don't want it to be a show," Ronel said. "We're doing this for people who are going blind in Africa. I don't want it to be: 'Look at these Americans having wine and cheese and getting Botox.' "

According to Ronel, a very simple operation that costs \$25-\$50 in Africa could cure some 7 million people there who have blindness caused by cataracts.

"It's a very expensive operation in this country," said Ronel, because of malpractice insurance and supply costs.

In this country, cataracts is seen as a problem that plagues older people, but not in Africa.

"It affects women and children there," Ronel said, "because they're malnourished and get infections."

And if you're wondering what the connection is between Botox and the charity work, Ronel says it's an easy way for plastic surgeons to raise money to help.

This year's national fundraiser has commitments from physicians in more than 35 states. The Eyes of Africa Initiative is working to raise more than \$250,000 to complete its first comprehensive training center for community ophthalmology in all of Africa, located in Moshi, Tanzania.

"There's a hospital that's already half built," Ronel said. "The project is also to teach doctors how to do the procedure."

While he won't offer fundraiser attendees his usual 20-minute consultation for Botox, he will give some 10 to 15 minutes to those who have never had Botox before. They can choose: either the furrowed brow area or those pesky crow's feet.

At his office last week, Lisa Briggs-Valdez, 45, of Las Vegas, N.M., was experiencing Botox injections for the first time, in her brow.

"I have total trust in him," said Briggs-Valdez, who is a patient of Ronel's for reconstructive surgery after bilateral mastectomies.

"He never gave up on me," she said, "even though I have other health issues that complicate things."

Using "the tiniest needle known to man," Ronel said, he administered five injections along her brow line.

Afterward, Briggs-Valdez said, "It wasn't even like a bee sting. I expected it to hurt more."

Ronel, a former Outward Bound instructor who once thought he would be a country doctor in New England, discovered New Mexico when he was a pediatrician for the U.S. Air Force for four years and one assignment was at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque.

He later went back to school to become a sub-specialist in pediatrics and discovered plastic surgery.

"It appeals to my desire to mix beauty and science," said Ronel, who grew up in Princeton, N.J., in an academic and artistic household.

Educated at Princeton and Columbia, Ronel is certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery.

But Ronel isn't a complete miracle worker: Don't expect to walk out the door wrinkle-free.

"It takes an average of five to 10 days for the wrinkles to efface," Ronel said.

The magic lasts for some six months. At approximately 180 days, the cost is about \$1.39 per day.

**WHAT:** Plastic surgeon Daniel N. Ronel is offering reduced-cost Botox injections at his offices as part of a national fundraiser.

**WHEN:** 2-6 p.m. Wednesday in Albuquerque and 2-6 p.m. Thursday in Santa Fe.

**WHERE:** 1020 Tijeras NE, Suite 16 in Albuquerque and 444 St. Michael's Drive in Santa Fe.

**HOW MUCH:** The cost is \$250, a reduction from his usual charge of \$375. To sign up or for more information, call 505-954-4900.