

Giving Back

Local doctors volunteer their medical skills in U.S. and abroad.

Ruthan Brodsky

Special to the Jewish News

No one I know goes on medical missions for recognition or to get rich," says Aaron Rives, 65, a podiatrist in Riverview. "I had refused offers to go on missions for 30 years and gave donations instead. This year, I was motivated because I wanted my son, Steven, to join me so we could both experience the opportunity to help others.

"Steven is finishing his rotating internship at St. Mary Mercy Livonia Hospital, and I thought it would be a cool thing to do together before he started his residency."

Father and son joined with DOCARE, a Chicago-based medical outreach organization that provides healthcare to indigent and isolated people in remote areas worldwide. They left in early June for Guatemala City, where they stayed in between days of busing through jungle and mountain roads to remote villages.

One bus transported the physicians, several nurses and second-year medical students, while another bus carried medical supplies. The supply bus contained 60 suitcases filled with everything from antibiotics to gauze and antiseptics.

"Each day it took at least 30 minutes for all of us to just load the supply bus and then it was usually a two-hour ride to a village," Rives says. "The medical students were very helpful. It was obvious after the first day that they weren't doing this to beef up their resumes. They genuinely wanted to help people."

Rives says he saw a degree of poverty he had never experienced. He saw children playing soccer with an empty pop bottle.

The doctors worked 10-12 hours a day for close to four days and treated more than 1,200 patients. As a podiatrist, Rives first dealt with foot and ankle problems.

"There weren't that many patients so we helped the pain management doctor because he was overwhelmed," Rives says. "We worked in what looked like a three-room schoolhouse with one light bulb. I had to relearn how to give injections in joints, such as the knee. I also had to make some difficult medical decisions.

"Some of the people I saw had conditions that were so severe that an amputation would normally be required. However, there was no way patients could receive aftercare, which meant I had to find the best alternative treatment



In Guatemala: Dr. Aaron Rives and his son, Steven, a medical resident.

I could. I never got used to examining patients who looked 20-25 years older than they actually were. They aged so rapidly working in the fields 10-15 hours a day."

Rives grew up in a family that consistently donated to Jewish and other worthy causes.

"I hope that we were the same role models for our kids," he says. "Working in Guatemala was a tremendous mitzvah in the Jewish tradition of giving back. Just receiving the appreciation that was showered on us made the trip even more meaningful. I'm looking forward to repeating the experience with Steven next year."

Steven says, "My parents taught us early that it's better to give than to receive. Before beginning my residency was a perfect time to volunteer for this medical outreach program. It was very rewarding to work alongside my dad, who was my motivation for attending medical school and is my role model for a doctor. Giving to those less fortunate is personally heartwarming and makes me appreciate how my medical skills can help others."

Giving Back Stateside

Frederick Fletcher, D.O., found his medical mission closer to home. For the last two years, he has volunteered his medical skills in family practice and internal

medicine at the Caridad Center in Boynton Beach during the seven months he spends in Florida.

"I retired in 2000 and missed practicing medicine," Fletcher says. "At the Caridad Center, I can put my skills to work without the hassle of running an office."



Dr. Frederick Fletcher

Fletcher explained that the center was originally founded in 1989 to assist migrant workers who labored on Florida farms.

Today it is a nonprofit multi-service health clinic staffed by 500 volunteers, including 100 physicians and 70 dentists serving a growing uninsured immigrant population. The facility doesn't receive government funds but relies on donations. The income of patients is carefully screened before they are admitted to the Center. Only those who can't afford healthcare are accepted.

"I don't see many patients in one day because it takes such a long time to examine them and then to communicate with them through an interpreter," Fletcher says. "Sometimes it's very frustrating because it's difficult to find hospitals that will admit the uninsured. Even so, I find it a very rewarding experience. The people are so appreciative." □

Jewish Women's Foundation Awards Special Grants

After completing its 2013 grant cycle and awarding more than \$230,000 for projects that benefit Jewish women and girls, trustees of the Jewish Women's Foundation recently voted to award special, one-time gifts totaling \$56,000 to Detroit area organizations that serve at-risk women and children.

"JWF always uses our growing endowment returns to make meaningful grants in the Jewish community, but when we have especially strong returns on our investments, we are able to award special gifts to programs in the broader community," said Carolyn Tisdale, JWF chairperson.

Special one-time gifts:

- Alternatives for Girls, Detroit: \$20,000 to help purchase a new van.
- Racquet UP! Detroit: \$10,000 for sports and enrichment programming, following 80 Detroit elementary school children through high school.
- Pasteur Elementary School Alumni Association: \$5,000 to ensure summer enrichment, education and nutrition programs and to purchase more iPads for teachers.

• JCS-Flint: \$2,000 to supplement a 2013 JWF grant project that provides senior Russian-speaking immigrant women with health and fitness programs.

• CARE House, Oakland County's Child Abuse and Neglect Council: \$5,000 for "Stewards for Children," a training program for educators and first responders in the area of child abuse and neglect.

• Orchards Children's Services: \$5,000 to send foster children to area summer camps.

• Planned Parenthood Detroit Health Care Clinic: \$5,000 to help pay for check-ups and contraception services for women who are uninsured.

• Pitch for Detroit: \$4,000 to support the August 2013 Pitch for Detroit event on Belle Isle that benefits "Do it for Detroit" and NEXTGen Detroit, offering competitive mini-grants to Detroit agencies that serve at-risk populations.

JWF's annual open board meeting will be Tuesday, Sept. 17, at the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills. Participants will take the first guided tour of the new exhibit, "Through Anne Frank's Window," featuring a chestnut tree sapling from the tree Anne Frank watched while hiding in an Amsterdam attic.

The meeting is open to the community at no charge; reservations are required. Go to www.jewishdetroit.org/jwf or contact Helen Katz, director, at (248) 203-1483 or katz@jfmf.org. □