

DELAWARE Health

News tips: 324-2876 or health@delawareonline.com •••

Tell us

Are you weighed down by your oversized shoulder bag? Do you suffer with bunions and aching arches in the name of fashion? Are your bras pretty but painful? If so, reporter Kelly Bothum would like to talk with you for an upcoming story about the physical price women pay to stay in style – specifically, the effect it has on their health and bodies. She can be reached at 324-2962 or kbothum@delawareonline.com. Contact her by Jan. 2.



COMPASSIONATE CARE



HAITI
This young boy, dying of AIDS, touched nurse Kassie Grey's heart.



MOLDOVA
Dr. Robert Arm's preventive dental care helps young children like these.



PHILIPPINES
Dr. Louis Rafetto assists many in need while learning about other cultures.



PERU
Dr. Christian Pizarro shares his surgical skills with local doctors.

These countries are among the many places where Delaware doctors and nurses have traveled to donate their time and medical skills.



KENYA
Nurse Gail Geesaman has made five trips with the Operation Smile organization.

Volunteers extend helping hand across globe

By KELLY BOTHUM
The News Journal

Working 12 hours a day for a week or two in an impoverished country probably doesn't sound like much of a vacation to most people.

But Gail Geesaman isn't most people. The Milford Memorial Hospital operating room nurse has used her vacation time to take five such medical missions. She's visited Kenya, Honduras, China and the Philippines.

She said helping people overseas augments her world travel and gives her the chance to change someone's life for the better.

Like Geesaman, Dr. David Birch can't imagine a life that didn't involve caring for those less fortunate, no matter where they are.

"I have to," said the Lewes family physician.

This year, The News Journal is shining the spotlight on a handful of Delaware health professionals who donate their time to help strangers half a world away. They are but a few of the many good people across the state who do so.

The work is done quietly, without any desire for recognition.

Because of them, children can smile without shame.

Because of them, little girls can show off a pair of earrings and a renewed sense of pride.

Because of them, a child's heart pumps the right way.

Because of them, an old woman gets the medication she needs to treat her high blood pressure.

Because of them, the world is a better place for many. Here are their stories.



ABOVE: Milford Memorial nurse Gail Geesaman holds a child during a trip with Operation Smile to the Philippines. RIGHT: Dr. Louis Rafetto, an oral surgeon from Wilmington, experiences a new culture during a trip to serve people in Cambodia.



Dr. Rafael Zaragoza

Job: Retired urologist, Kent General Hospital in Dover
Country visited: Philippines

For all but one of the last 17 years, Dr. Rafael Zaragoza has made annual trips to his native Philippines on humanitarian medical missions.

In the beginning he went as part of the Society of Philippine Surgeons in America. But in 1995 Zaragoza, a member of the Dover Rotary Club, decided to open up the mission experience to those in the Dover area. He and other local physicians formed Operation We Care. They joined with another group of medical volunteers from Ohio who also were active in their local Rotary Club. (Operation We Care still receives financial support from both Rotary Club groups.)

Since then, a group of Dover doctors, nurses and other health professionals have traveled at their own expense to the Philippines once a year to provide surgery to Filipinos who can't otherwise afford it.

Last February, in a five-day period, the group handled 122 major and 131 minor surgeries, including thyroidectomies, bladder stone removal, hernia operations and prostate operations. They also handled nearly 1,200 dental extractions.

Because there are so many cases, the surgeons in Operation We Care get a little crafty. That means there usually are two surgeries going on at the same time in the operating room. Minor surgeries using local anesthesia typically are performed outside the operating room, in a corridor.

Zaragoza is a urologist by training, but over the years he's learned how to perform surgery to repair cleft lips, a common congenital deformity. One of his most memorable cases was that of a 7-year-old girl with a cleft lip who refused to go to school because she was teased about the way she looked. After Zaragoza repaired her lip, he handed her a mirror.

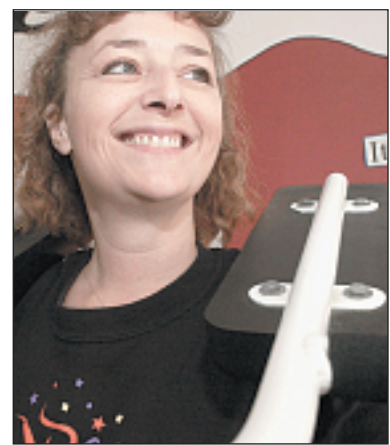
For the first time since Zaragoza had seen her, the little girl smiled. She told him she was ready to return to school.

See HELP—F4

SHARE YOUR STORIES

We know many Delaware doctors, nurses and other health professionals give generously of their time to help others in need. If you volunteer overseas or know someone who does, The News Journal wants to hear from you. Visit www.delawareonline.com/health to submit stories and photos of your overseas medical missions. Or e-mail them to health@delawareonline.com. We will post these experiences online and may select some to be published in future issues of Delaware Health.

getfit



Exercise and diet help woman with multiple sclerosis get into shape.

F2

physical therapy

Simple exercises can help prevent knee problems.

F2

fitness



Dancing offers a variety of workouts for people of all ages.

F3

living with eczema



Skin condition may be caused by an overactive immune system.

F5



The best gift you can give your family... let someone else drive.

Wishing you a healthy and safe holiday season. Remember, if you drink, please let someone else drive.



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