

## Moraga's Medical Missionaries

By Andrea Firth



Pharmacist Pat Thompson (far left) in Cuenca, Ecuador Photo provided

**“Y**ou always get way more than you give,” says Pat Thompson, a Moraga resident and clinical pharmacist, about her recent trip to Cuenca, Ecuador as part of a medical missionary team.

Thompson and two fellow Moragans, pediatrician Patricia Francis and surgical nurse Debra Lippman, were members of an all women team of health care professionals from across the United States who spent a week in the Andes ministering both medically and spiritually to the Cuenca locals. “The clinic in Cuenca is supported by the local church. So the patients first went to triage, then to see the priest, then to see the doctors. And, the clinicians were able to pray with the patients which was an unique experience,” notes Thompson.

Thompson, Francis, and Lippman are all members of the Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church, and each was seeking the opportunity to participate in a medical mission that would utilize both their time and their talents. “When Patti [Francis] found this opportunity, I was right on board,” states Thompson. The three friends started planning and preparing for the trip about six months before departing by obtaining donations of over-the-counter and prescription medications and medical supplies. “Everything we used we brought,” she adds.

“They advertise that the American doctors are coming,” explains

Thompson. “And they come. Some travel quite a distance.” The three clinicians worked five long clinic days caring for ailments including parasites, skin infections, vitamin deficiencies, stomach discomfort, chronic pain and more. They saw over 600 patients, filled over 1100 prescriptions, and a surgical team performed fourteen operations. Francis, the only pediatrician in the group, was deluged with young patients.

“These people live a hard physical life and often receive very little medical care,” notes Thompson. She was impressed by their appreciative nature and charmed by the fact that even the local farmhands would wear their best (and probably only) silk shirt when they came for treatment at the clinic.

Accustomed to verbally counseling her patients on the safe use of their medications, Thompson was curious about how she would communicate effectively. “I can get by in French, but I knew about two words of Spanish before I went,” notes Thompson. With the help of some translators, Thompson was able to surmount the language barrier and learn some Spanish along the way. “By the end of the week, I could tell a patient how to use their arthritis medication in fluent Spanish,” adds Thompson with a laugh. And since she is already to planning to return to the clinic in Cuenca, she is planning to take some classes in Spanish as well.