

# Life in LAMORINDA

We've been calling them our "Doctor Do-Goods." We hear frequently about local health professionals, among many other Lamorindans, who are committed to helping others above and beyond their daily work and in very different ways. Andrea Firth met a group of Moragans who travel to Ecuador

to provide health care, Cathy Tyson talked to a Lafayette pediatrician who brings theater to underprivileged kids closer to home, and Chris Lavin found an Orinda ophthalmologist who offers cataract surgery to patients in Guatemala. We are pleased to present their stories in this three-part feature.

## Pediatrician by Day, Producer by Night

By Cathy Tyson

Dr. Sam Lewis, Lafayette pediatrician, could easily go home after a long day at the office treating sick children, have a glass of wine and relax. Instead he's been involved for many years with the Belasco Theater Company. As the volunteer producer of "The Wiz," he's been instrumental in rustling up donations to make this summer production possible in Oakland, as well as offer scholarships to economically disadvantaged youth to participate in performances.

Having seen his own son Rob, a former student at Happy Valley Elementary and Acalanes benefit from Belasco training, Lewis wanted to make theater available to kids who otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity. By

offering free admission and free bus transportation to prior "Wiz" performances, thanks to many generous donations, a substantial number of students from inner city schools and youth groups were able to see the show. Outreach will continue for this August's shows.

"He is definitely dedicated" said Kamaria Ousley, who plays Dorothy, "the Wiz is a big thing, a great musical. It's also a chance to show African Americans someone that looks like you on stage." Ousley went to Skyline High School and recently graduated from Boston's Berkeley School of Music. She's currently a professional singer at the Apollo. Dave Abrams, the Scarecrow, chimes in "he's always mentoring, like a Dad to me." Abrams will be a freshman



From left, Dave Abrams, Sam Lewis, Kamaria Ousley, Jonathan Smothers Photo Cathy Tyson

at UC Berkeley this fall. "Dr. Lewis has this inclusive theatrical outlook, doing something positive for city kids," said Jonathan Smothers, looking resplendent in his Cowardly Lion

costume. Prior to being in the 2000 production of "The Wiz," Smothers was a struggling high school student. He's now a senior at San Francisco State University. "These phenomenally tal-

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ented kids let me into their lives. They text me all the time and call me when they're sick. It's my church," said Lewis. "My kids are out of the house now, so I have more time. I'm not afraid to ask for things - including donations."

Performances from August 7 - 22 at the Malonga Arts Center, formerly the Alice Arts Center, near the 12th Street BART station. Information on tickets, show times, donations and volunteering at [www.belasco.org](http://www.belasco.org) or call his office at 925-283-8241.

## Moraga's Medical Missionaries

By Andrea Firth



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

"You 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 a 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.

## Orinda Eye Doctor Goes South

By Chris Lavin



A nurse holds a cataract Photo provided

Kids grow up quickly, and one of the steps of Andy Sorenson's growing up happened when he was 13. His father had removed a cataract from the eye of a patient, dropped it, clink, into a small dish, and handed it to him. The boy carefully picked up the dish, and took it down the road. It was Guatemala, and he was to show the patient's family what had been making their father become blind.

"It was pretty amazing," Sorenson said. He still thinks about that day - all the time.


Yet that experience happened more than three decades ago, and while Sorenson now lives in Orinda, he still goes back to Central America. He became an ophthalmologist like his father, and his brother, and they all operate the Sorenson Eye Clinic in Berkeley when they're not removing cataracts at the Hospital

de la Familia in northern Guatemala, mainly for descendants of the Mayan tribe.

Sorenson is modest when he speaks of his work. "You can't do anything without the nurses," he says, when asked about his accomplishments. He speaks of his patients fondly, and his photo collection includes lots of shots of lots of smiling people with big white pads taped over one eye, often giving the thumb's up sign.

If left untreated, cataracts continue to develop in the lens of an eye, finally resulting in blindness. Lack of health care, and specialists who are able to do eye surgery, lead thousands of people to become blind in Guatemala, and they have no recourse but to accept their condition. Sorenson is part of an 18-member team who goes to Guatemala to do the surgeries, where he can remove 30 to 40 cataracts a day.

Sorenson isn't the only one to give back. His wife, Erika, is on the board of the Orinda Union School District, and they have three children, ages 10, 12 and 14.



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