



VOSH-NECO

Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity/New England Council of Optometrists

Winter/Spring 2007, 2008

VOSH-ONE president Derek Feifke, OD was right in the center of activity when he represented our Chapter at the sounding of the NASDAQ closing bell to celebrate World Sight Day on October 19, 2007. In the photo at right, he's flanked by V/I Executive Director Harry Zeltzer, OD, and Ruth McAndrews OD, immediate past-president.



VOSH-ONE (NECO) returns to Armenia

by Linda Bennett, OD, VOSH-NECO trip leader

In late September, 2007, seven optometrists, a fourth year optometry student, a nurse and thirteen volunteers traveled to Armenia for a second VOSH trip. Five clinics were held outside the capital city of Yerevan and a total of 935 patients were seen.

Yerevan has experienced considerable changes in just the past two and a half years. The United States government has built a new embassy there, its second largest in the world.



Dr. Linda Bennett (above) and Dr. Leora Burns (left) with Armenian patients

Construction projects are going on all over the city. There is a positive feeling among the people that things are improving. Yerevan has more of an international appearance with western stores carrying BOSS, Gucci and other name brand products. However, not much has changed in the countryside where



our clinics were held. Pensioners are especially hard hit by the economic changes that are occurring.

Derek Feifke, OD, tapped to serve as VOSH-NECO (ONE) president

At the VOSH-NECO (One) Annual Meeting in May, Derek Feifke, OD, of Lexington, MA, was named president for the next two years. Already he's traveled to Florida and to NY to represent us, he's spearheading the development of our Chapter website and he's playing an active role in VOSH-INTERNATIONAL's collaboration with IMEC (International Medical Equipment Collaborative), to get equipment and supplies to developing countries.

Here's a real life example: It's pouring rain and he's wearing a Tee shirt and chinos, perched on the back of an open truck that is heaving and thrashing over a rocky road. No complaints. Instead, Dr. Feifke removes his shirt and has someone in the cab hold onto it until the team reaches its clinic site. He shakes himself off, puts on his shirt and he's ready to see patients who are already lined up as far as the eye can see.

As he's become a more seasoned VOSHer, Dr. Feifke has taken it

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Dr. Feifke is no newcomer to our organization. He has been a dedicated VOSH team member for the past several years, providing his time and talent annually wherever one of our teams has asked him to help out.

Lots of things can and do go awry on these VOSH trips, but Dr. Feifke never complains and he always adds an air of quiet calm.

www.VOSH-ONE.org
Chapter website now under construction

Check it out! We're working on a website for our chapter and you can follow the progress at www.VOSH.ONE.org. Your thoughts and criticisms are welcome.

VOSH-NECO to become VOSH-ONE

VOSH-NECO is in the process of changing its name. Once the filed paperwork is approved, our 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization will be known as VOSH-ONE (VOSH of New England).

Like it? VOSHer Ed Warren, OD of New Hampshire, came up with the catchy moniker at our annual meeting in May.

Nothing else will be different about our 6-state Chapter, just our title. We're making the change in order to avoid confusion with the New England College of Optometry which now uses the acronym, NECO.

When our organization was founded in the mid-1990s, we selected the name VOSH-NECO, because we were then allied

with the New England Council of Optometrists (NECO), a New England regional optometric organization that even provided us some financial support. That organization disbanded several years ago.

With the title no longer in conflict, the New England College of Optometry opted to shorten its acronym from NEWENCO to NECO.

We are indebted to the faculty and students of the college for its many contributions to our programs, but we are both separate organizations. With this action, there won't be any confusion.

Hence, once the paperwork is cleared, we shall be known as VOSH-ONE.

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VOSH-ONE is a chapter of VOSH/INTERNATIONAL. The organization is dedicated to the preservation of human sight, mainly in developing countries where there is no welfare system.

VOSH-ONE accomplishes its goals through its own missions or by assisting other groups with the same purpose.

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To Armenia a second time

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Our first clinic was held in the town of Tutu Choor (translated as sour water), in the Tchambarak region of Lake Sevan. The mayor of Tutu Choor told us that we were the first doctors to ever come to the village.

Yeghnadzor is the only village where we had held a clinic in 2005. This time our group stayed overnight in Jermuk so that we were only an hour's ride from the village, giving us a full day to see patients and enjoy the hospitality of the villagers. We were treated to a lesson in lavash baking and home grown farm food, a really special treat.

We were fortunate to have a volunteer optician from California join us at the final two clinics. Lussian Kamberian is volunteering her time to work with the Armenia Eye Care Project, an organization that has made a full time commitment to eradicating blindness in Armenia. Our group took time to make a connection with this organization and it will follow up on our referrals.

The trip was sponsored by AMARAS, a US Armenian organization based in Watertown, MA and dedicated to promoting appreciation of the Armenian arts and culture in Armenia and the USA. Reverend Joanne Hartunian again served

as our program manager and was assisted by Peggy Hovanessian. The VOSH team was invited as guest optometrists to the Republic of Armenia; clinic sites were decided in cooperation and consultation with Armenia's Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Armenian Embassy in Washington, DC.

Of the 935 patients who were seen, 46 required referrals, mostly for mature cataracts. Spectacles were given to 894 patients with many requiring two pairs. Well over half needed hyperopic prescription and over 200 myopic prescriptions were dispensed. We filled 121 prescriptions in Armenia using all the funds in the Armenia Eyeglass fund. Only four pairs of glasses had to be made in US upon our return.

A third VOSH trip to Armenia is planned for the fall of 2009. If interested, contact Linda Bennett, OD, at lbennettod@earthlink.net Contributions to VOSH-NECO's Armenia Eyeglass Fund can be sent to PO Box 41, Holden MA 01520-0041. Checks should be made payable to VOSH-NECO (ONE) and earmarked for the Armenian Eyeglass Fund.

More photos and the complete text of this report can be read on our VOSH-ONE website, www.VOSH-ONE.org



One memorable patient

by Rita Cherian, fourth-year NECO intern

We were conducting eye exams in the village of Maralyk, in the outskirts of Armenia. Patients were lining up in swarms with documentation and passport in hand. An elderly Armenian woman sat at my station. As I started taking her case history, the woman explained that she was blind from glaucoma and that she had been taking pilocarpine drops. She said her left eye was completely blind and she could see only figures and light with her right eye.

I proceeded with the exam and pulled out my retinoscopy rack and retinoscope. The woman began frantically gesturing that each lens I moved was better than the previous one and then she started crying. She was extremely emotional since she had lost all hope of seeing. Tears streamed down her cheeks and mine as well. Before I even put the trial frame on her face, she was kissing my hands and thanking me. After all was done, she was a -3.00 D myope. I couldn't hold back the tears. We both embraced. I still fill up whenever I recount this story that makes optometry such a worthwhile profession.

SVOSH-NECO serves Bateyes in the Dominican Republic

by Andrea Murphy, OD

SVOSH-NECO president, 2006-07

Spring Break 2007 proved to be a life-changing week for eighteen VOSH students at the New England College of Optometry, their faculty advisor Bina Patel, OD, two additional ODs, and two translators who boarded a plane headed to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Our mission: to provide eyecare and vision services to as many residents of the underserved batey populations as possible.

Prior to the trip, we spent many hours organizing recycled glasses (donated from Lions Clubs in the Boston area), fundraising to help offset travel costs for each member, and obtaining medications and loaner equipment.

Details of the trip were organized through the collaboration of Andrea Murphy, SVOSH-NECO President and Ulrick Gaillard, CEO and Founder of the Batey Relief Alliance (BRA) & Maria Virtudes Berroa, Executive Director. The BRA is a non-profit organization established 10 years ago to help extinguish the inequities in healthcare & education present in the bateyes of the Dominican Republic.

People living in the bateyes are of Haitian origin and the poorest people living in the Dominican Republic. They have been discriminated against by the native Dominicans and fear to live in Haiti. Most live without running water, electricity or medical care.

The BRA helped organize our clinic site and patient base, as well as our accommodations and internal ground transportation. We were responsible for

flight arrangements and organizing our own eyeglasses, medicines, supplies, and equipment.

During our 5 days of patient care, we examined 1,020 patients, ranging in age from 3 to 93 years old. Patients came from the surrounding communities of Mata Palacio, Morquecho, Casa Colorada, Magua, Monte Coca, Consuelo, Hato Mayor, and Las Pajas. The majority were Spanish-speaking, with a few speaking only French-Creole.



ABOVE: Liz Garland registers local students while they strike a pose for the camera.:TOP: Kit Tung LP searches the library of glasses to fill a prescription

We dispensed non-prescription sunglasses and artificial tears to nearly every patient as well as prescription glasses to those requiring refractive correction. These included single vision and/or bifocal spectacles for

myopia, hyperopia, astigmatism, and presbyopia—totaling nearly 2200 pairs of sunglasses and glasses dispensed for the week. A handful of patients were identified with more specialty types of refractive needs and will receive custom-made lenses from the States.

We encountered a number of challenging clinical cases, including advanced cataracts, pathological myopia, beginning to end-stage glaucoma, hypertensive & diabetic retinopathy, macular degeneration, dry eye, pterygia, corneal ulcers/scars from ocular trauma, and even interesting systemic disorders such as Marfan's Syndrome.

A small supply of medication was given to patients requiring pharmaceutical care and those requiring long-term medications and cataract or pterygia surgery will be placed on a list to hopefully receive further care from area clinics or other mission groups.



NOW YANILKA CAN SEE:

NECO Intern Sung Hu Choi is shown with Yanilka, a 6-year-old aphakic girl who came to the SVOSH-NECO clinic in the Dominican Republic held last spring. Yanilka was born with congenital cataracts and had surgery to remove them two years prior.

The youngster had very subtle developmental abnormalities, including malformed teeth, a skewed tongue, and a long forehead. She also had microcornea enophthalmos, and a dense corneal scar on her forehead. In her left eye she was observed to be aphakic, has nystagmus, a hypoplastic disc, salt and pepper fundus, suggestive of rubella retinopathy.

The beautiful youngster was given a pair of high plus glasses from our inventory and she received two more pairs that were made for her here in the US.

The care Yanilka received will have a lasting impression on her quality of life.

The service and care we provided was very much appreciated by the Dominican people. As optometry interns we gained a great deal of experience in patient care and learned to communicate better. We also gained insight to the culture and nature of the people living in the bateyes. Words cannot explain the gratification that comes when you fit a patient with a pair of glasses and they are able to see clearly for the first time in their life. However, it is also humbling, as sometimes you examine a patient who is legally blind from a potentially treatable disease or simply because they cannot afford further care.

**Please share this
newsletter with your
patients and friends.**

SVOSH-NECO students oversee glasses recycling project at MCI

by Amanda Jimenez,
SVOSH-NECO president

Neutralizing used glasses is a big job and a time consuming one.

Several years ago, through efforts initiated by our VOSH-NECO Chapter, the Massachusetts Correctional Institution (MCI) in Norfolk, MA started an Eyeglass Recycling Program. The program presents a vocational opportunity for inmates residing there while providing us the invaluable volunteer labor needed to get the task done.

Two inmates have been volunteering in the program pretty much since it got underway. On average, they work 2-3 hours each day neutralizing the used glasses with automatic lensometers, then cleaning and sorting them into appropriate categories.

Last fall, NECO students Andrea Murphy, Aaron Law, and Amanda Jimenez were asked to work with the two men to assist them in setting up an organizational system to better meet the needs of mission groups utilizing the recycled glasses. We continue to serve as liaison between MCI and VOSH-ONE (NECO).

Presently, due to lack of space, donated used glasses are being directly routed to MCI rather than to the college as was previously done. We continue to handle all pick ups of recycled glasses from MCI and deliveries to team leaders requesting them.

About 2,200 pairs of glasses and sunglasses recycled through the MCI program were dispensed during the student VOSH trip to the Dominican Republic this past spring alone. (See report on page 5). Others benefitting from the project include the VOSH-NECO team that went to Armenia, the team of NECO students serving an externship in El Salvador in August, 2007, Ghana mission in August, 2007, the VOSH NECO/Williams College collaborative group working in Nicaragua in 2008 and others.

Also this year, SVOSH-NECO student



Optometry student Kalli Leung filled this woman's prescription from the inventory of recycled glasses the VOSH team brought along.

volunteers have assisted with two other glasses neutralization projects. Twelve-year-old Chason Timko solicited our help in neutralizing 133 pairs of glasses which he collected to send to Peru. Chason asked for the donations from family and friends as a Bar Mitzvah project.

We've also been assisting local Lions Clubs with their "Sri Lanka Project." Already, 20,000 pairs of glasses have been cleaned, neutralized, and bagged, but

there are 10,000 more still needing to be processed. At the request of Joe Rizzo, Massachusetts 33-S District Governor of the Lions Club, VOSH members have volunteered to neutralize 3,000 pairs of glasses. Once all 30,000 pairs of recycled glasses have been neutralized, they will be sent to Sri Lanka.

Where to send glasses

Please keep those used glasses coming. For information on where to drop them off, please contact student VOSH-NECO president, Amanda Jimenez, at Amanda_Jimenez@neco.edu.

Team Sight and Bite returns to El Salvador, Visits newly-formed Optometry School

by Jenifer Ambler, OD,
Eyecare Team Leader

Three ODs who have been serving in El Salvador for a number of years once again held 5 days of clinics in early November, examining over 80 patients daily in their two adopted towns of Apopa, and Suchitoto.

Unlike many VOSH missions, these locations have a high amount of astigmatism, although we certainly dispensed a large number of readers.

Dr. Natalia Colome, the El Salvadoran Director of the country's recently-formed School of Optometry, worked with our team on her day off. We passed on to Dr. Colome our remaining children's glasses and medications which she delivered to Hospital Bloom, El Salvador's top children's hospital.

Since the school is less than a half-hour away from our clinic site, Dr. Colome treated us to a tour of the campus. The first "real" class will begin in January, 2008, but the facility has been operating on a small scale over the past year.

Exam units are in various states of assembly and the lab is already actively making glasses for children in their



Ed Warren, OD, of New Hampshire in Apopa.

school screening program, using frames and blank lenses obtained from VOSH-Washington and other sources. Dr. Colome was thrilled to receive a supply of frames we brought on behalf of Dr. Bina Patel's VOSH students at the New England College of Optometry.

We are looking forward to continued collaborations with the school which clearly is an important first for Central America. It has the potential to advance the development of sustainable in-country eyecare programs to address the enormous need that exists throughout the region.

If you have uncut blank lenses to donate, please contact me at amblerj@sover.net.



School Director Dr. Natalia Colome shows off the examining room at the fledgling optometry school on the campus of the Universidad de El Salvador.



Another honor for Harry

At the VOSH/INTERNATIONAL meeting held in Tampa, FL at the end of October, the Board surprised Executive Director Harry Zeltzer, OD, with a lifetime achievement award in recognition of all he has done for the organization through the years.

Ruth McAndrews, outgoing president of VOSH/INTERNATIONAL made the presentation which is a sculptured glass globe which symbolizes our planet.

There isn't much that he hasn't done. Along with his varied duties as Executive Director, Dr. Zeltzer - Harry - singlehandedly keeps the VOSH/INTERNATIONAL website up-to-date, answers inquiries and connects volunteers with opportunities. That in itself is a daunting task which keeps him busy right through many a night.

Harry continues to participate in VOSH missions around the globe and he has been instrumental in making connections with other organizations that have opened important collaborations for VOSH in its mission to provide eyecare to the needy in underdeveloped parts of the globe.

He was instrumental in getting a container of eye examining equipment, books and glasses to Ghana for use in its fledgling optometry schools and is now working on a further collaboration with another organization to send eyecare-related equipment to Central America.

We're proud to claim Dr. Zeltzer as a member of our Chapter. Indeed, Dr. Zeltzer was one of the founders of VOSH-NECO. Despite his many activities on the international stage, he continues to actively participate in our meetings and recruit us to think and act more globally. Congratulations, Harry.

Dr. Feifke leads

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upon himself to bring along an added "goody" bag, a small library of some of the more difficult prescriptions. No one ever asked. He just understood that there could never be enough of certain prescriptions, and so he culled and neutralized them himself from the thousands of pairs of glasses donated by patients in his Burlington office.

Along with his time and talent, Derek has served VOSH-ONE well by providing the third important skill of any board member: money. For the past six years he has qualified and raced in the Boston Marathon on behalf of VOSH-ONE, singlehandedly raising more than \$17,000 to support our projects.

Dr. Feifke attempted to broaden the project this year by applying for one of the Marathon's highly prized, non-profit organization slots which would enable a team of VOSH volunteer to participate in the Marathon. Though unsuccessful this year, he remains committed to trying again.

Dr. Feifke hails from Johannesburg, South Africa, where he earned a diploma in optometry from the faculty of Health



Newly-elected VOSH-NECO (ONE) president Derek Feifke, OD, (second from left), poses with his board: L-r: Vice-president Lee Lerner, OD; immediate past-president Jay Jordan, OD; and treasurer Joe D'Amico, OD. Missing from photo: Secretary Bina Patel, OD.

and Biotechnology at the Technikon Witwatersrand. After completing his studies, he worked in private practice and lectured part-time at the University of the North. Even in those days he was an activist, assisting a team of professionals who brought eye and medical care to the indigent and rural.

In 1988, Dr. Feifke came to the United States to return to school at the New England College of Optometry, earning a Doctor of Optometry degree in 1990. Upon completing his studies, Dr. Feifke started In-Sight Optical, a private practice in Burlington, MA which he continues to direct. (See In-sightoptical.com).

Upcoming VOSH-NECO trips

The need for eyecare services in underdeveloped areas remains acute. We need your help. Please don't hesitate to inquire about joining one of the VOSH-ONE trips noted below, or visit www.VOSH.org for information regarding other VOSH trips. When you visit www.VOSH.org, click onto VOSH-ONE on the Chapters page, for additional trip photos. While you're at it, check out VOSH-ONE.org, our Chapter website which is presently under construction.

- From Jan. 9-19, 2008, Faculty members Elise Harb, OD, and Catherine Johnson, OD, along with students from the New England College of Optometry, will return to the Bluefields area of Nicaragua to team up with Bob Peck, program coordinator of a team of Williams College students. Contact: harbe@neco.edu

- Chris Fields, OD, and Jay Jordan, OD, will be leading a team to the southern part of the island of Ometepe, Nicaragua, from February 17-23, 2008. Contact chris.r.fields@hitchcock.org

- Harry Zeltzer, OD, and a multi-disciplinary medical mission (ASAPROSAR) will return to Santa Ana, El Salvador, in late January, 2008. Contact: harryizeltzer@comcast.net

- SVOSH-NECO, the student VOSH-NECO group at the New England College of Optometry, is planning a return VOSH trip to the bateyes in the Dominican Republic, in March, 2008. Faculty Advisor is Bina Patel, OD. Contact: PatelB@neco.edu or student leader amanda_jimenez@neco.edu

- Janice Ewing, OD, will again lead a team to Coya, Peru, early to mid-June, 2008. Contact: evedocewing@yahoo.com

- Jenifer Ambler, OD, of Vermont is the leader of the eyecare portion of a mixed medical group known as the "Sight and Bite" team, which has been active in Suchitoto and Apopa, El Salvador, since the early 1990s. Return date: November, 2008. Contact: amblerj@sover.net

- Linda Bennett, OD, of Belmont, will be leading a trip to Armenia in the fall of, 2009. Contact lbennettod@earthlink.net

WILLIAMS COLLEGE, VOSH-NECO (ONE), FADCANIC CONTINUE COLLABORATIVE EFFORT ON ATLANTIC COAST OF NICARAGUA: *Evan as final preparations for the 2008 annual Williams College winter project are nearly complete, Project Coordinator Bob Peck of Williams College reports that in January, 2007, the team screened or examined over 2,400 individuals in fifteen small communities around Pearl Lagoon and further north. FADCANIC is a Nicaraguan-based Foundation whose purpose is to advance development in the Atlantic Coast. It was founded by American Ray Hooker.*

As a result of the extraordinary experience in Nicaragua, Williams student Meghan Ramsey will return to teach in Pearl Lagoon this summer. She is the fourth student to do so since the project got underway several years ago.

VOSH/IMEC join together to transfer Ophthalmic Equipment to impoverished countries

Your equipment, books wanted

The International Medical Equipment Collaborative, (IMEC) has been shipping surplus and donated medical equipment from its headquarters in North Andover to impoverished countries for over 12 years. With the dire need for ophthalmic equipment and supplies in countries served by VOSH, it was practically a marriage made in heaven when IMEC, VOSH/INTERNATIONAL and VOSH-ONE recently agreed to join forces in this endeavor. This collaboration provides a great conduit for the transfer of used ophthalmic equipment to clinics in the poorest nations.



Your donated equipment has already enabled us to establish a single exam lane in a permanent clinic site in San Jaun del Sur, Nicaragua.

If you have any equipment you are no longer using (in good working condition or brand new), please contact us as there is always someone in desperate need in third-world areas who can use it. Email: Derek Feifke, OD, at decabs@aol.com for further information.

VOSH-ONE

Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity / VOSH of New England



Please join VOSH-NECO (ONE) and help provide the gift of sight to needy individuals in other countries as well as within our own borders. All

members of VOSH-NECO (ONE) are members of VOSH/INTERNATIONAL.

Whether you are interested in taking trips, making a donation, or have glasses and equipment to offer or just want to be informed of our projects, we value your support.

Annual dues, just

\$40

Please make your tax-deductible check payable to:

VOSH-NECO (ONE)
Joe D'Amico, Treasurer
PO Box 41
Holden, MA 01520

Enclosed is an additional donation of \$ _____

to further the work of **VOSH-ONE**.

Name _____

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e-mail _____

Please be sure your writing is legible and don't forget to let us know if your email address changes.

VOSH-NECO (ONE), GLOBAL HEALTH CARE COLLABORATE IN AYOPAL, NICARAGUA: *In mid-November, 2007, team leader Jay Jordan, OD, assisted by Joe D'Amico, OD and a small group of adjunct helpers,*



traveled to Ayopal, a small town in the mountains north of Managua, Nicaragua. it took nearly a full day of travel to reach the site, maneuvering rough roads, fording rivers and avoiding potholes, so it is not surprising to learn that no eye team had ever been here before.

The ODs saw trauma, birth defects, and many other serious eye problems, serving nearly 1,000 patients overall. Patients came one after the other, with a long line continually waiting. There was no time for lunch, yet the community prepared chicken and rice, so the team gratefully accepted their generosity. and broke bread with them. "Ayopal: it's the reason we are still so excited about the work we do on VOSH missions," says Dr. D'Amico.

Pictured above: an Ayopal couple with their son who was diagnosed with strabismus and received glasses to correct the problem at the VOSH eye care clinic held in their town.

Be sure to check our Chapter website:

www.VOSH-ONE.org

and the V/I website: www.VOSH.org

for more information, references, ideas, assistance, or to read/post messages on the message board.