



# VOSH-ONE

Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity / of New England

Winter/Spring 2010-2011



## **VOSH-ONE's Joe D'Amico, OD, honored by V/I**

*By Harry Zeltzer, OD*

Each year, VOSH/INTERNATIONAL presents a Humanitarian Award to honor a member who has distinguished her or himself through leadership, invention and public health practice or by transitioning missions to sustainable eye care. We are pleased to report that the 2010 recipient is our own chapter's Joseph A. D'Amico, OD, aka Joe.

A practicing optometrist for the past 47 years, Joe has served VOSH for nearly half that time. He initially became aware of the group through his younger daughter Jennifer when she was a student at SUNY College of Optometry. Her student VOSH group had scheduled a mission to Guatemala but they were short a doctor. Yes, it was short notice, but would he go?

Of course Joe agreed. It was, indeed, a wonderful sharing - but equally significant, it was a transformative life experience which inspired him to make VOSH an integral part of his life. After his first trip to Nicaragua, Joe wanted to be able to communicate better, so back home, his first action was to enroll in a refresher Spanish class.

Since then, Joe has led a myriad of trips to Central America. He is an inno-

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## **Derek Feifke, OD is our Marathon Man**

Derek Feifke, OD, of Lexington, MA has been an active VOSHer for a number of years, serving as a team member, team leader, organization president and even as Marathon Man. He ran his personal best in the Boston Marathon this year: 3 hours, 36 minutes. What's more, he raised a record amount of money for VOSH-ONE, bringing the total from his marathon efforts over the past several years to approximately \$20,000.

Derek's Boston Marathon run this past April on behalf of VOSH-ONE was featured extensively in a Boston Globe online article the day prior to the big event. For a link to the actual article, see the home page of our website, [www.VOSH-ONE.org](http://www.VOSH-ONE.org)



## **In Memorium**

### **Tom Little, OD 1949 - 2010**

Just over a year ago, VOSH-ONE approved partial financial support for 2 grant proposals submitted to the Board by Tom Little, OD. The Board felt the projects had the potential to make a longterm impact in providing sustainable eyecare services to the impoverished in Afghanistan. (See VOSH-ONE newsletter, winter-spring, 2009-2010).

Dr. Little and 9 others were killed in late August so the projects have been suspended. Dr. Little's team was returning from a 120-mile trek on foot and horseback to treat villagers in the remote Nuristan region. Until this incident, the area was considered one of Afghanistan's safest provinces.

In early December, 2009, Dr. Little traveled to Boston to present a slide lecture on his work at the New England College of Optometry where he'd earned his OD degree just two years earlier. One student asked if he'd ever been concerned for his own welfare. Dr. Little said that he'd spent much of his adult life there, that he and his wife loved the country and had raised their 3 children there. He noted that he spoke fluent Dari and to a lesser extent, Pushto, so he was pretty comfortable wherever he went, but he said he did avoid going into areas where there was active military activity.

A memorial was held in Loudonville, NY where over 300 people attended. Dr. Little was posthumously honored by President Obama with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He was also named the International Optometrist of the Year by the World Council of Optometry. The award was recognized with a minute of silence at the opening session of the WCO's World Conference on Optometric Education in September, 2010, in Durban, South Africa.

*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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## ***From the president's desk***

*by Lee Lerner, OD, President, VOSH-ONE*

As I enter the last few months of my two-year stint as VOSH-ONE President, it's time to reflect on all the good work the organization has done. Our members have participated in scores of missions all over the world and we have provided many thousands of pairs of eyeglasses that have improved people's lives in unimaginable ways. We have also treated countless cases of glaucoma and infections, thus preventing blindness in individuals who would never have been treated if we were not there.

Although I am very proud of my colleagues' work during the past few years, I am just as proud of how our organization is evolving. This spring we will begin awarding scholarships to optometry students and recent graduates so those willing to work, but lacking funds can remain active VOSHers. We have also been making strides in setting up sustainable clinics and training local people in poor locales to help their own. And, although it is on hold due to the tragic death of Dr. Tom Little, we have provided support to set up a training program in Afghanistan. In addition, the student branch of our organization continues to help poor residents of Massachusetts through their screenings and at the Sharewood clinic. Equally exciting – and important for the continued health of our organization – is seeing active students become NECO graduates and take on leadership roles in our organization.

At the VOSH-INTERNATIONAL meeting this past October, it was apparent that V/I is also evolving. There were several presentations about how to fabricate glasses with exact prescriptions on site so patients don't have to settle for used glasses that may be a little off. There was also a presentation by an ophthalmic surgeon whose group wants to work with us to help people needing eye surgery. When I started working with VOSH in 1989, these topics would not have been discussed.

The next VOSH/INTERNATIONAL Annual Meeting will take place right here in Boston, on October 16, 2011, immediately following the American Academy of Optometry meeting. It couldn't be more convenient for anyone who lives in the New England area. I urge you to mark your calendar now and plan to attend. It's an inspiring, informative event.

As always I encourage anyone who sees this newsletter to join VOSH. Everybody has a skill that can help others, whether locally or in a foreign country. I am sure that during the next few years, under the leadership of President-Elect Dr. Wendy Crusberg, VOSH-ONE will provide glasses and meds to even more people and will grow to provide services in ways I have not even thought of.

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

***Our Chapter website: [www.VOSH-ONE.org](http://www.VOSH-ONE.org)***

***Our parent organization website: [www.VOSH.org](http://www.VOSH.org)***

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***You may want to note these dates:***

***VOSH-ONE Annual Meeting/Elections    Sunday, May 1, 2011  
NECO Clausen Room, Beacon St., Boston (9AM-NOON)***

\* \* \* \* \*

***VOSH/INTERNATIONAL Annual Meeting    October 16, 2011  
Hynes Convention Center Boston  
(following the American Academy of Optometry Meeting)***



## Summary Report for VOSH Mission 2010 San Antonio, Yamasa, Dominican Republic

Nicole Ross, OD,  
former president SVOSH-NECO

On April 10, 2010, nineteen optometry students and five optometrists departed Boston for a ten day mission trip to the Dominican Republic. As mem-

bers of the VOSH program at the New England College of Optometry (NECO), these students volunteered countless hours fundraising and preparing for the long awaited trip abroad. Thousands

of glasses were packed, eye medicines collected, and hand-held equipment gathered as we prepared to travel to an area in desperate need of health services.

San Antonio, Yamasa, is the third most impoverished area in the Dominican Republic. The population consists of former workers of a recently shut down sugarcane plantation who would otherwise not have access to healthcare. This particular population suffers from significant malnutrition, including anemia and deficiencies in vitamins A, B and C; these are all essential in maintaining good ocular health.

The student VOSH program at NECO consists of over 150 active members ranging from first- to third-year optometry students. Each year, a group of third-year students are selected based on prior service hours in fundraising, glasses organization, and community screenings. All members invited on the trip have dedicated numerous hours volunteering their time providing eye care to the greater Boston area. VOSH members participate in Lions club screenings, volunteer monthly at the Sharewood Free Clinic and educate the public about eye health at community health fairs.

The group worked under the direction of five optometrists: Dr. Bina Patel (faculty advisor), Dr. Michael Ruby, Dr. Andrew McLeod, Dr. Devina Patel and Dr. Anna-Maria Baglieri.

The group collaborated with the Batey Relief Alliance (BRA) for our fourth mission to the Dominican Republic. The BRA

non-profit organization which was established 10 years ago to help eliminate the longstanding disparities in healthcare & education present throughout the Bateys of the Dominican



Republic. The country is comprised of more than 20 bateys, the majority of which are impoverished and have very limited access to medical attention. Additionally, due to the lack of access to education and resources such as running water and electricity, these populations suf-

fer a greater risk for developing morbidities that would otherwise be preventable. The BRA played an integral role in organizing the clinic site, gathering patient base, and providing accommodations for internal ground transportation. Student VOSH-ONE was responsible for flight arrangements and organizing our own eyeglasses, medicines, supplies, and equipment.

On Sunday morning, we met in the lobby of the hotel and headed to the site to set up. The clinic site was a small church located a 2-hour bus ride away from the hotel. In this small church with one electricity line powered by a small car battery, we were able to create a functional clinic with four stations: an entrance-testing station, eight refracting lanes, an ocular disease station, and an optical dispensary.

The next five days proved to be very challenging yet rewarding. We started on Monday, only to realize that we had no translator! Our Spanish skills quickly improved that day. By the next day we were operating with 3 fluent translators, including an English teacher from a nearby town who recruited the help of his students. Other English-speaking people from nearby villages showed up each day, offering assistance with clinical testing, crowd control, and directing patient flow.

Over the course of the week, the group examined 1041 patients, ranging in age

### Recent/Upcoming VOSH-ONE Eye Clinics

*Have you often thought about going on a VOSH trip, but then pushed it off and gone on with your life? Please don't hesitate to e-mail or call one of the trip leaders listed below to talk about taking part in a VOSH-ONE eyecare clinic. If these dates or sites, don't work for you, go to [www.VOSH.org](http://www.VOSH.org) for information regarding additional VOSH trips scheduled by other Chapters.*

● Jenifer Ambler, OD, of Vermont continues as leader of the eyecare section of a combined eye/dental care team that's been dubbed the "Sight and Bite" group. Dr. Ambler is seeking more ODs for this year's team which will once again serve in Suchitoto and Apopa, El Salvador. Scheduled dates: February 19-27, 2011. Contact: [amblerj@sover.net](mailto:amblerj@sover.net)

● In late January, 2011, faculty members and students from the New England College of Optometry will return to the Bluefields area of Nicaragua to work with Bob Peck, program coordinator of a team of Williams College students. Contact: [harbe@neco.edu](mailto:harbe@neco.edu)

● Additional ODs are needed to assist a multi-disciplinary medical mission (ASAPROSAR) when it returns to Santa Ana and San Miguel, El Salvador, in late January, 2011. Contact:

[harryizeltzer@comcast.net](mailto:harryizeltzer@comcast.net)

● Joe D'Amico, OD, will lead a team to the area of Esteli, Nicaragua, from February 27 to March 6, 2011. Contact [eyeclam@aol.com](mailto:eyeclam@aol.com)

● SVOSH-ONE, the student VOSH group at the New England College of Optometry, is planning a student trip during spring break, April 2011. Faculty Advisor is Bina Patel, OD. Contact: [PatelB@neco.edu](mailto:PatelB@neco.edu) or student leader [James\\_Sanborn@neco.edu](mailto:James_Sanborn@neco.edu).

## ***VOSH-ONE returns to eastern Nicaragua*** ***San Carlos, El Castillo and Papaturro, 2010***

*By Joe D'Amico, OD, trip leader*

This year's VOSH-ONE trip to eastern Nicaragua was marked not only by outstanding moments, but by outstanding hours.

We worked in 3 towns including El Castillo, a town of 3,500 where the only access is by boat up the Rio San Juan. On the last day of clinics, we found ourselves on an unanticipated adventure by boat up the Rio Papaturro to the tiny town of the same name. The waterway is part of the Rio San Juan biopreserve. The hour long journey was a constant head jerker. Howler monkeys in the trees, iguanas, herons, cranes, flamingos, turtles, unusual butterflies, birds that dive under water. It was a ride of a lifetime.

Papaturro (population 1,800) has road access only through Costa Rica; it is a marvel of a simpler way of life. The town was great, people were definitely in need of eye care, and we were treated to a wonderful lunch made by a grateful community. Even though the return trip was difficult - we got hung up several times in the river due to low water - it was definitely one of the most extraordinary days I've had on a VOSH trip.

Because of the difficulty of access, our group was limited to 12. It included four ODs, one registered optician, and 7 ancillary helpers. I appreciate the wonderful way our people worked together. Everyone filled in wherever there was a need; by week's end we saw just under 1,000 patients.

Lic. Fatima Ruiz was the MINSA representative who helped us with the ground work in bringing our team to a new MINSA area. (Minisa is the ministry of health in Nicaragua.) Dr. Freddy Ruiz (no relation to Fatima) is the head of MINSA in San Carlos and has been a major help in setting up clinics throughout the frontera. Past trips to other rural towns such as Los Chiles, Ahlmendro, Buena Vista and Sabalos would have been

impossible without him. Working with MINSA also gives us a chance to get surgical help for people with high risk of blindness.

This trip was a combined effort of VOSH and Global Health Cares. Roger Barios, a Global Health Cares Nica employee, was our main interpreter and consultant on "problemas Nicaraguenses." He was an invaluable asset.

Among the many interesting cases: Dr. Chris Fields examined an 11-year-old girl with a blown-out left eye and reported the right eye had pressure of 41! She would have become totally blind in months. Because he started her on drops and wrote up the case she may at least have access

to drops to keep the pressure down, but she would really benefit from laser trabeculotomy.

Dr. Jim Luccio examined a 15-year-old boy who only had light perception. His family was told by a Costa Rican eye doctor that he needed a corneal transplant. His corneas were clear, but his vitreous was so milky it did not allow us to see the retina. His refraction was about 7 diopters of myopia, but of course he said the glasses only made a slight difference. A vitrectomy and then the inevitable cataracts would be a long term treatment that



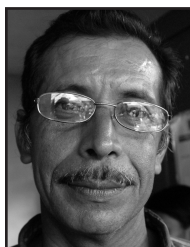
*ABOVE: George Oser, OD, examines a patient as others wait their turn. CENTER: Appreciative patients smile for the camera and a young boy being measured for lenses to be made back home.*

would be very difficult in Nicaragua. We detailed his case to the head of MINSA to see what might be done.

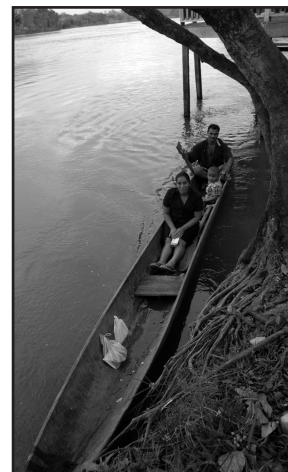
I examined a 38-year-old man who had an imbedded metal foreign body in his left eye for several months. His eye was very red, and he had almost lost the foreign body sensation. The cornea was opacified for about 3 mm around the piece of metal. I used a needle to remove the metal, and gave him an anti-inflammatory and an antibiotic to help him heal. He probably will have a large scar, but fortunately the area was not central. Untreated, he might have lost the cornea in a year or less.

We were able to provide glasses to many individuals but we brought home a number of prescriptions to be made up here, that had 3, 4, even 5 diopters of astigmatism.

Many patients had high prescriptions. Even in rural areas where people don't drive or go to the movies, it's nice to see faces, birds, be able to thread the needle, to be able to clean rice.



*ABOVE, RIGHT: The people of El Castillo*





## Basketball by Day, Medical Care by Night

by James Sanborn, SVOSH-NECO Vice-President



As the echoes of bouncing basketballs and the squeaks of sneakers fade away, the medical students from Tufts get to work. Tuesday evenings, the gymnasium of a local church in Malden is transformed into a clinic, providing free health services..... including comprehensive eye examinations! Students involved in VOSH from the New England College of Optometry volunteer their time to conduct exams free of charge. They have also been able to collect reading glasses to provide to patients who may need them, along with artificial tears and sunglasses. On an average night, between fifteen to twenty patients are seen by the optometry service, with even more being seen by the clinic as a whole.



Priscilla Lenihan uses a newly-donated slit lamp to examine a patient as a colleague looks on.



TOP: NECO student Debby Young with a patient ABOVE: neatly laid out items in the makeshift dispensary area.

Thanks to several highly motivated and enthusiastic students, along with a recently acquired slit lamp, there are plans to expand these services from once to twice a month, and to increase the number of patients seen each night. There are also plans to work more closely with the Tufts medical students to ensure that each patient has access to other healthcare resources, including applications to MassHealth and seasonal flu vaccines.

So what's the bottom line? In the basketball games that take place in the gym by day, there will be winners and there will be losers. But in the evenings, by providing eyecare to an underserved population in a multidisciplinary setting, both students and patients end up as winners.

## Notes from Nicaragua, 2010

Excerpt by Zabelle D'Amico

As I go about my drip-dry existence back home here in Holden, MA, I keep thinking about so many of the little moments from our recent VOSH-ONE trip to Nicaragua, led by my husband, Joe. For one, I keep thinking about those crisply starched and ironed pink tablecloths in El Castillo.

Shortly after checking into our hotelito our small team walked up to the nearby health center where our eye clinic was to be held. We'd need spaces for examining, a place for screening and a place for the dispensary. We asked our Nica hosts for a couple of tables to be set up so we could lay out our eyeglass inventory.

El Castillo is a remote, tiny hamlet with no interior roads, no laundromat, no dry cleaner. Wide, smooth scrubbing stones are the norm for washing. Most folks make their living by subsistence farming. Outdoor water pumps are visible in a number of places so it's clear that running water is never taken for granted.

Still, the people of El Castillo took the

time to set out three tables, each with a long, clean, crisply- starched pink linen tablecloth which added a touch of elegance to the table surface. This was a special occasion and they marked the moment by making the tables pretty, did it despite the hot, humid, shirt-soaking weather punctuated by a heavy downpour and despite the effort involved to wash, never mind starch and iron linens.

On our last day of clinic, we traveled through an amazing bio-preserve to the tiny town of Papaturro. We hadn't planned on much for lunch, but when the time came, Roger, a local businessman who'd been helping all morning, led the group down the street to a small

home/restaurant where some local women had prepared a hearty meal of crispy fried chicken, french fries, glistening rice and black beans, and assorted root vegetables.

"It was delicious," I noted a little later to Roger, "but I am concerned that we have taken advantage of someone. Can we pay?" "No, no," he explained. "I want you to understand. The people of this pueblo are good people, but they are very poor and they can rely only on themselves. They never receive offers of help from the outside so they couldn't believe

that you wanted to do something for them. They wanted to let you know how much it means to them that you have taken the time out of your busy lives in America to come here to this tiny village to help them see better. You could have gone anywhere in the world, but you chose to come here to help. They wanted to prepare a traditional lunch for you as a way to say thank you."



In El Castillo, dispensary tables were set with crisply-starched linen tablecloths. Local helpers also surprised us with chairs and canopies for the comfort of those waiting.

## ***VOSH to Dominican Republic***

*Continued from page 3*

from less than 1 year to 110 years old.

We were able to provide prescription glasses in the form of single vision for almost everyone. About forty people had prescriptions that we could not provide on site.

Glasses were made in Boston and sent back to these individuals. Every person received a pair of sunglasses and artificial tears, as the incidence of significant pterygia was greater than 20% in this population.

We encountered many unique clinical cases including: advanced cataracts, keratoconus, end-stage glaucoma, initial stages of pthisis bulbi, congenital esotropia, and many suspicious conjunctival growths. Antibiotics, allergy medications, steroids, and artificial tears were



given as needed. A one-year supply of glaucoma drops was dispensed to every glaucoma patient. In addition, we screened a group of 35 schoolchildren for pathology and refractive error that might impede their ability to learn.

On our last day, the village organized a celebration to show their appreciation. It included stories from the English class which had volunteered the previous day, and traditional Dominican dancing. Each member of the group received a plaque and the Student VOSH group received a special plaque from the BRA to commemorate our long-standing working relationship.

The student VOSH mission to the Dominican Republic 2010 proved to be a great success. The clinical skills and

knowledge gained in this setting will transcend into our professional careers. We experienced a sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction as we were able to provide the gift of sight for the first time with a simple pair of spectacles.

## ***Humanitarian Award***

*Continued from page 1*

vator who has brought eye care to isolated regions. He introduced VOSH to Belize where a VOSH colleague was teaching optometry at the time. He has served in Armenia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, its islands of Ometepe and Solentiname and in a numerous villages along the Rio San Juan.

Joe's commitment to VOSH has brought many colleagues, students and friends into the fold of humanitarian eye care, including his daughter and son-in-law optometrists, his wife Zabelle, past editor of the VOSH/INTERNATIONAL newsletter and another daughter who served as a translator in Latin America.

During the early 90s, Joe cofounded our New England Chapter (VOSH-ONE), and has continued to serve in leadership roles ever since.

During his presidency, Joe worked with VOSH-ONE colleagues Dr. Harry Zeltzer and the late Dr. Phil Richmond to establish a glasses recycling program at the Norfolk Prison and recruited ongoing participation in the project by the student VOSH group at the New England College of Optometry.

With the help of their Nicaraguan liaison, Joe and colleague Jay Jordan, OD, set up a permanent one-lane eye clinic within a local health care center in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua. Their hope was to attract many more ODs to volunteer and study Spanish in this charming town. The two made a parallel effort to train one of the clinic staff do basic refractions.

Joe has continued to guide and encourage numerous optometrists who have expressed interest in becoming team leaders. His involvement went to the limit when he brought a disabled Nicaraguan teen to his home for major foot surgery and recuperation.

We salute you, Joe, on this well-deserved honor.



# **VOSH-ONE**

*Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity of New England*

Please join VOSH-ONE and help provide the gift of sight to needy individuals in other countries as well as within our own borders. All VOSH-ONE members are members of VOSH/INTERNATIONAL.

Whether you are interested in taking trips, making a donation, have glasses and equipment to offer or just want to be informed of our projects, we value your support. VOSH-ONE is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

*To pay online, visit our website: [www.VOSH-ONE.org](http://www.VOSH-ONE.org) or you can send your tax-deductible check payable to:*

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

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