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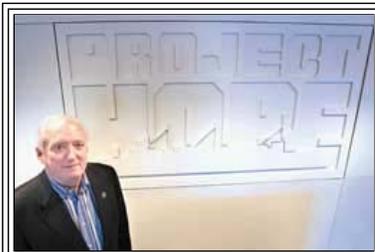
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Saturday, December 13, 2008

A half-century of HOPE

By Jason Kane
The Winchester Star

Millwood — The ramshackle clinic Dennis Lucey remembered was gone.



John Howe III, chief executive officer of Project HOPE, stands in the lobby of Carter Hall, the humanitarian organization's headquarters, in Millwood. (Photo by Jeff Taylor)

It had been 30 years since he visited Maceio, Brazil, on a Project HOPE humanitarian mission, and he barely recognized the place.

"The clinic had been a disaster, to put it mildly," Lucey said. "But we were able to do a lot of good there."

The good news: Several miles away stood the clinic's six-story, 200-bed reincarnation.

As Lucey approached the entrance, he saw a sign written

in Portuguese on the door: "Welcome to Dr. Lucey — after 30 years the house you helped to build continues to be your house."

Lucey started to cry. "I was absolutely amazed — it's probably the best cancer hospital in all of Brazil. By laying the groundwork you can really build something beautiful."

For Project HOPE's 50th anniversary this month, the organization — based in the Clarke County community of Millwood and named for a brighter ideal in international health care — is recognizing its history and broadening its mission.

Much work remains to be done, officials say.

During the last 50 years, Project HOPE — Health Opportunities for People Everywhere — has worked in more than 100 countries, distributed more than \$2 billion in medicine and

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medical supplies, and trained more than two million health care workers.

Locally, its international headquarters has pumped millions of dollars into the area economy each year, created nearly 100 local jobs, and hosted dignitaries from throughout the world who have attempted to respond to the world's emergencies and long-term health-care needs.

These are significant accomplishments for a nonprofit organization that began with a single ship.



Project HOPE began in 1958 with the ship SS HOPE, formerly the USS Consolation, which was donated to the organization by President Eisenhower.
 (Photo provided by Project HOPE)

"We started with \$150 and a lot of faith in the American people," said Dr. William B. Walsh in a book on Project HOPE in 1972.

Humble beginnings

Walsh, who died in 1996, didn't expect much action when he asked President Dwight D. Eisenhower to donate a Navy vessel that could be transformed into a floating teaching hospital for professionals from disadvantaged countries.

A former medical officer aboard a destroyer in World War II, Walsh had witnessed horror. Not just that of war, but of rampant tuberculosis, parasitic diseases, and malnutrition among the world's most vulnerable people, many of them children.

He demanded action.

The reply from the White House was swift: "I have been impressed with the merit of the proposal," Eisenhower wrote to Walsh in 1959. That's how the USS Consolation was christened the SS HOPE — the world's first peacetime hospital ship.

In 1960, the 11,141-ton Haven class hospital vessel set sail from San Francisco for a year-long voyage that would find it docked in the ports of Vietnam and Indonesia.

Amid the palm trees, heat, and throngs of desperate people seeking medical attention, the ship's volunteer personnel trained hundreds of doctors and nurses, opened an orthopedic rehabilitation center, and treated thousands of people suffering from leprosy, cancers, infections, and malnutrition.

A documentary film titled "Project HOPE" captured that first mission, winning the 1961 Academy Award for best documentary short subject.



Ann Gadomski, a pediatrician volunteering with Project HOPE, examines a child in Santa Rosa, Guyana, in November.
 (Photo provided by Project HOPE)

In other nations, the response wasn't always so friendly. When the SS HOPE sailed into the port in Trujillo, Peru, in 1962, a small mob lined the shore to protest the U.S. government.

But the doctors had their own agenda — founding Peru's first school of nursing and first training program for special education teachers, establishing health clinics in impoverished neighborhoods, and treating patients for hookworm, skin infections, tuberculosis, and cleft

palates.

When they left nearly a year later, a crowd of about 45,000 waved goodbye and threw petals into the water. "Tell your people to send us more ships of hope," one Peruvian said.



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Walsh seemed satisfied after the third international trip.

"The SS HOPE has lived up to its name," he said. "That short, bright challenge painted boldly on the side of a white ship. It carries hope to new nations. We teach and we also learn from them. By doing so, we embody the America we believe in, a peace-loving, friendly nation."

The ship sailed on. To Ecuador in 1963, to the Republic of Guinea in 1964, to Nicaragua in 1966, Colombia in 1967, and Tunisia in 1969.

Dennis Lucey joined the crew of the SS HOPE for its 11th and final voyage in 1973 — the one that traveled to Brazil.

He was a marketing manager with the Xerox Corp. on a year-long sabbatical, and was looking for some meaning in life.

As the ship's business manager, he found it in the people around him. In the 50 doctors, 10 dentists, and 250 nurses aboard the ship. And in the patients, too.

One little Brazilian boy, brought to the ship for medical care, had been burned so badly — by a burning mosquito net above his bed — that his parents thought he would die.

"The secret of his living was blood," Lucey said. "And the people on that ship donated until he had enough. When the boy left the boat, we joked that he was more American than Brazilian."

Lucey has "thousands of stories like that," he said. The substantive work accomplished inspired him so much that he later became a country director for the Peace Corps' operations in Liberia.

Now living in McLean and the vice president of a Washington-based information technology company, Lucey said the HOPE trip taught him that many of the world's troubles would be solved "if we treated people as if they're part of the same human race."

"Whether you're Brazilian or Liberian or American — people have dreams. They have desires. They want to prosper."



Project HOPE volunteers trained medical counterparts and treated children in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in 1968 during the SS HOPE's seventh voyage. (Photo provided by Project HOPE)



In 1978 Project HOPE moved its base of operations to Carter Hall near Millwood. (Photo by Jeff Taylor)

Ground control in Millwood

Figuring out a way to help them succeed — often in impossible conditions — is the tricky part, said Stuart Myers, Project HOPE's acting vice president of global health.

He leaned forward over an executive conference table during a recent interview at HOPE's headquarters and tried to reel off the organization's accomplishments from 2008: a new program to train diabetes educators in India; the completion of a new children's hospital in Iraq; the 25th anniversary of a partnership with the Chinese government to train medical personnel.

Grand and far-flung projects — so why the base in the rural community of Millwood?

"As an international non-governmental organization, we are different in the sense that we are out here," he said, nodding toward the Blue Ridge Mountains. "But just drive around the place. It's a good setting to get away from the pressures and get things done."

The organization moved to a ground-based approach after officials retired

the flagship SS HOPE in 1974 because of old age and escalating operational costs.

They packed up their paperwork and desks in 1978 and headed to Millwood's Carter Hall — a donated campus that came with acre upon acre of rolling hills, winding driveways, and a 20-bedroom, 18th century mansion.

In this atmosphere, reminiscent of hoop skirts and old whiskey, HOPE's leaders talked of darker things — such as malaria and tuberculosis — and ways to overcome them.

In the years that followed, HOPE's initial moves into new project countries were triggered by a variety of factors, Myers said. One of the biggest: disaster.

Whether because of earthquakes, war, or the outbreak of illness, HOPE personnel deployed time and again on short notice to heal the immediate wounds of catastrophe.

When an earthquake in 1988 leveled entire Armenian cities, HOPE workers provided emergency relief and arranged airlifts for dozens of the most seriously injured children to the United States. They stayed in Armenia to improve long-term care for the other children, establishing pediatric rehabilitation units and training Armenian colleagues in the latest advances in rehabilitative therapy, orthopedic surgery, and critical care.

That's where Project HOPE's signature "training the trainers" model comes in.

The concept is simple, HOPE officials said — you don't just swoop in to heal 10 broken bones in a two-week period, but use a percentage of time in each country to train several dozen medical personnel to do the work in the future. That way, hundreds of thousands of bones can be healed in coming years.



John Howe III, chief executive officer of Project HOPE, displays a model of the SS HOPE at the top of a shelf in his office at Millwood's Carter Hall. Howe recalls following the travels of the ship as a boy through the pages of Weekly Reader magazine. Now at the helm of the international organization, he remembers the lasting impression of those old magazine stories: "It was of America's humanity," he said.
(Photo by Jeff Taylor)

PROJECT HOPE BY THE NUMBERS

EMPLOYEES

Millwood headquarters: 92
Winchester distribution center: 8
United States: 134
Worldwide: 562

VOLUNTEERS

2008 volunteers: 174
Navy mission volunteers
(2005-present): 683

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Nearly half of Project HOPE's Millwood employees live in Winchester, or Frederick and Clarke counties.
Total Millwood expenditures (2007) were \$23,419,734, with an economic impact of \$58,549,335.
Total distribution center operating expenditures (2007) were \$758,730, with an economic impact of \$1,896,824.

SOURCE: Project HOPE

As evidenced by some of HOPE's longest-running projects, it works. In 1974, the organization became the first U.S. private voluntary group to work behind the Iron Curtain, with a program in Poland aimed at training nurses and improving the health of children. Today, more than 80 percent of all nurses in Poland have been trained by Project HOPE.

In Wuhan, China, the organization trained 19 clinical physicians from 16 counties of the Hubei Province. In turn, those physicians trained an additional 1,181 health-care workers and educated 175 community members.

The efforts affected the lives of more than 3,000 people living with HIV, and contributed to a drop in mortality rates from 49 percent to 8.8 percent over a four-year period, HOPE officials said.

Urgent pleas for help also came from the United States and foreign governments.

In 1991, the group responded to a request from President George H.W. Bush to coordinate a massive humanitarian aid effort to the republics of the former Soviet Union. HOPE volunteers distributed more than \$300 million in medical supplies — antibiotics, vaccines, and cardiac and cancer drugs — to more than 290 hospitals.

"The reason we have had longstanding relations with the people of Indonesia, of China, of Russia is that we only go where asked and only stay as long as we're wanted," said John P. Howe III, HOPE's chief executive officer.

The organization's volunteers and staff have battled HIV/AIDS in southern Africa and tuberculosis in central Asia since the 1990s, rushed humanitarian aid to war-ravaged Bosnia in 1992, helped to train the medical team in China's newly opened Shanghai Children's Medical Center in 1998, and accompanied first lady Laura Bush on a health-care fact-finding mission to Iraq in 2003 — which led to the plans for the soon-to-be-opened Basrah Children's Hospital.

In recent years, HOPE officials have become creative, branching into chronic disease education, support for orphans and vulnerable children, and micro-financing. Its village health banks have distributed 157,000 loans worth \$25 million to more than 12,000 women in six countries.

"Our loans provide an economic lift for the families," Myers said, "which can then access better food and better health care."

Charity begins at home

Then HOPE came home.

When Hurricane Katrina battered the Gulf Coast in 2005, hundreds of volunteers helped to pick up the pieces.

More than 75 volunteer physicians, nurses, social workers, and counselors came together to provide medical care aboard the Navy hospital ship Comfort, stationed in the Gulf of Mexico.

Dozens more worked in a family health center in Mississippi, and others helped to rebuild health facilities throughout the region.

It was HOPE's first domestic project in decades.

"There is a growing recognition that Project HOPE has expertise that could apply in the United States," Myers said.

In fact, a donor recently approached the organization with an offer to fund a project in the southeastern United States that will target diabetes education for American Indians.

The effort will begin next year, drawing on lessons learned from similar projects in India and China.

From Winchester to Malawi

At the organization's worldwide distribution center near Winchester Regional Airport, Chuck Clark, the distribution manager, pointed out stacks of boxes headed for the Republic of Georgia, Iraq, Tajikistan, and Malawi.

In 2008 alone, Project HOPE delivered more than \$3.7 million in gifts-in-kind to suffering children around the globe.

"This one's for Haiti," Clark said, glancing at packages loaded onto a wooden pallet. Surrounding him were shelves piled high with boxes of antibiotics, skin lotions, syringes, insulin badges, and dressings — 748 products to be exact, donated from companies such as Genzyme Corp., GlaxoSmith Kline, Johnson & Johnson, Merck & Co., and Wyeth.

More than a million pounds of freight leaves from the center each year, mostly bound for Washington Dulles International Airport or to ships docked in Norfolk. Sometimes the shipments contain just three or four boxes of pills; sometimes they fill 2 1/2 truckloads.

About 18 years ago, the distribution center was housed near Dulles. But

HOPE officials decided it would be more cost-efficient to move the warehouse to Winchester.

Once a single shipment arrives at its destination — Macedonia, Honduras, or South Africa, for example — the contents are separated and shipped to clinics and hospitals throughout the region.

On a top shelf of the warehouse stood thousands of copies of Project HOPE's Health Affairs journal. The organization's officials brag that The Washington Post has called the publication "the indispensable journal" and "the bible of health policy."

The first issue of the peer-reviewed journal rolled off the presses in 1981, designed to promote health policy research, analysis, and debate.

Today, the publication is still considered a must-read by policy analysts and medical doctors alike. "But not much has changed in the last 20 years," said Susan Dentzer, the new editor-in-chief. She hopes to lead the Bethesda, Md.-based journal into a more reader-friendly age.

"We want to continue to reach out to new audiences that have an increasing stake in the policy decisions our country will be making in the years ahead," she said.

That effort includes a physical redesign for the picture-less, scholarly journal and a shift into multimedia.

"Suffice it to say it is going to be more appealing and attractive, more in step with the times than the journal now looks," Dentzer said.

In the next few years, Health Affairs editors will also broaden the publication's scope and release an international version to deal with pressing health issues of other nations — such as Papua New Guinea.

Diagnose. Treat. Educate.

Early last summer, the volunteer medical staff wouldn't arrive before daybreak, but the line began forming each day at 3 a.m. in Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea.

About 2,000 people would funnel through the makeshift clinic that day to see the Project HOPE staff — some walking for two days to get there. Among them was a girl who looked far too thin for a 16-year-old, said Dr. Lynne Bouffard.

"It looked like she had HIV," said Bouffard, who signed up to volunteer with HOPE after learning about the organization during her tenure at Selma Medical Associates in Winchester.

After a quick oral test, Bouffard discovered the girl had, in fact, contracted the virus that causes AIDS. So she talked to the girl's pastor, who held considerable social sway in the community, and tried to persuade him to monitor her upcoming drug regiment.

"My biggest fear was she might be ostracized," Bouffard said. So she spoke to the 10 family members who lived in the girl's home and told them to keep loving her.

For the rest of the trip, Bouffard continued the three pillars of her volunteer work. Diagnose. Treat. Educate.

"In the United States, it would have been very easy," she said. But in one of the world's poorest nations, it is easier said than done.

Bouffard is not sure what happened to the girl, but she still thinks of her.

On to 100

Howe nailed a framed copy of the Weekly Reader magazine on his office wall after he became president and CEO of Project HOPE.

The 1960 photo on the cover of the magazine for children shows the SS HOPE about to set sail, and a small map in the corner of the page illustrates its direction.

Howe followed the travels of the ship as a boy in small-town Maine. Now at the helm of the international organization, he remembers the lasting impression of those old magazine stories: "It was of America's humanity," he said.

Today, the health challenges around the world are great, Howe said during an interview this week in his Millwood office. "We plan on making an even greater difference in the next 50 years."

On a recent trip to London to celebrate HOPE's 50th anniversary, Howe stopped to speak to a cab driver. In mid-conversation, the man noticed the "50th Anniversary" pin on his lapel.

"Project HOPE," he said. "Yes, I remember. The big white ship."

Different look, same mission, he told the driver.

"And we will continue to focus on health education and humanitarian aid for the next 50 years."

The world of tomorrow — he told the cabbie — will likely need a whole lot more of both.

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