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HOPE's staff aids victims of quake Medical supplies, volunteer help

By Jason Kane
The Winchester Star

Millwood — An earthquake half a world away created a flurry of activity in the northern Shenandoah Valley this week.

Project HOPE — the international health-aid organization based in Clarke County — completed its response to a devastating earthquake that rocked Indonesia Sept. 30.

The three-pronged effort had HOPE officials busy preparing medical supplies for shipment, recruiting credentialed doctors and professional volunteers for an upcoming mission, and flying a Millwood-based staff member to Indonesia to assess the situation.

The death toll from the Sept. 30 earthquake reached 784 Friday, and officials said they had little hope for the 242 people listed as missing.

At least 180,000 buildings were toppled or damaged in the quake, which also caused landslides that swept away entire villages in the hills.

Responding to a list of requested supplies from the Indonesian government, employees in HOPE's Winchester distribution center readied boxes for shipment that included items ranging from antibacterials to thermometers to intravenous solutions.

The shipment — worth \$939,619 — will be flown to Indonesia next week, said Rand Walton, the nonprofit organization's director of strategic communications.

HOPE — Health Opportunities for People Everywhere — has received 20 applications from medical personnel throughout the United States who have volunteered their services for a possible mission to Indonesia.

Among them is Judith Knickerbocker, a Winchester Medical Center nurse and long-time HOPE volunteer.

She first teamed up with HOPE after an earthquake hit the island of Nias, off the western coast of Sumatra, Indonesia, in 2005. She also joined missions to Haiti and the Dominican Republic this year and to Vietnam in 2007.

"It's hard work, but you meet so many different people and see so many different cultures," she said. "After one of the trips, you tend to want to go where the real need is."

In addition to broken limbs and other injuries directly related to the earthquake, the volunteers will respond to ailments and illnesses that have resulted from displacement.

"And after the immediate needs, we'll be looking at long-term training of local



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doctors to improve their rehabilitative and medical systems," Walton said.

Following an initial journey to Indonesia in 1960 aboard the famed SS HOPE, the organization returned to the nation when a tsunami struck in December 2004, killing 230,000 people in the Aceh province.

Throughout the following year, HOPE delivered millions of dollars worth of humanitarian aid and sent hundreds of medical volunteers to the region in partnership with the Navy.

In the time since, the organization's relief efforts have helped to re-establish and upgrade health posts in Indonesia's Nagan Raya District.

From 2005 to 2008, its work in Nagan Raya helped to improve health care for 3,332 infants, 13,866 children, 4,122 pregnant women, and 16,146 women of reproductive age.

This year, the maternal and child health program has been expanded to Aceh Barat — an area still recovering from the 2004 tsunami.

All 30 HOPE employees in Indonesia have confirmed that they are safe after the earthquake in September. The organization's programs continue to function normally, Walton said.

No departure date has been determined for the relief mission, but potential volunteers can learn more about the opportunity at project.hope.org.

The Associated Press provided some information for this report.

— Contact Jason Kane at jkane@winchesterstar.com
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