

On a mission

Farmington Hills nurse heads south for Operation Kindness

BY DIANE GALE ANDREASSI
SPECIAL WRITER

Planning a missionary trip to Mexico is a daunting task for anyone, but imagine what the whirlwind trip to a remote Mexican village with 40 surgeries in four days must do to Jan Glovak, who suffers from lupus, a disease that saps her energy and causes extreme joint pain.

During her sixth trip to Camargo, Glovak will be accompanied by Troy resident Dr. Michael Busuito, a Clinton Township physician, chief of plastic surgery at St. John Hospital in Detroit and Michiganian of the Year in 1995.

Operation Kindness, a nonprofit organization recruits medical experts, who pay their own airfare and volunteer their time. Operation Kindness pays for their hotel costs, medical supplies and a seven-hour bus ride that takes them from El Paso to Camargo. Costs are covered by donations.

Sitting in her Farmington Hills home a few days

■ **'There's a number of cases that really stick out. One family had a son, Miguel, who had a cleft lip and a little girl, Cecilia, with a cleft palate and the family drove 14 hours to get to us.'**

—Jan Glovak
—Farmington Hills nurse

before her departure, Glovak said the idea of transforming one life, not to mention the hundreds of lives she and physicians actually do touch, is enough to keep her going.

Touching lives

She talks about people like Silvia, a 13-year-old girl, who received treatment during a previous visit. Glovak's speech quickens and her excitement is obvious as she explains that Silvia had a huge cleft palate, a hole in the roof of her mouth that forced air through her nose, making her speech garbled.

"When she woke up from surgery and spoke to her mother, her mother cried and said: 'This is the first time we are able to understand her.' And if that doesn't melt your heart I don't know what will," said Glovak, a nurse who has been on medical leave from Hutzel Hospital in Warren since she was diagnosed with lupus.

"There's a number of cases that really stick out," Glovak said. "One family had a son, Miguel, who had a cleft lip and a little girl, Cecilia, with a cleft palate and the family drove 14 hours to get to us," she said.

The cost of surgery to correct a cleft lip is between \$2,000 to \$3,000 in Mexico and many of the people who seek help don't earn that much in one year.

Developing bonds

The volunteers often see some of the same people who need numerous surgeries year after year.

"It's like seeing family again and you really develop a bond with these people," said Glovak, adding that the group tries to make arrangements for treatment in the United

States for the extremely severe cases that can't be handled during the weeklong trip.

The team of medical experts has become more than just a group of people with kind hearts. They've learned to meet each other's needs, too. Even though Glovak's illness makes her weak and tired, the others insist that she continue to make the trip with promises that they will pick up the slack when she can't finish her job.

Busuito launched his charitable work years ago when he accompanied other physicians who donated their time to help children in the United States.

Twelve years ago, he started taking his talents overseas.

"It's just the type of work that gets in your blood and keeps you wanting to go back," Busuito said. "I think that one feels a great sense of satisfaction after doing something like this. Essentially, we all donate our time and most of us donate a lot of money in order to do this."

Heartfelt stories

He also tells stories about children who have a special place in his heart and memory: an 8-year-old girl in the Philippines whom he helped 18 months ago. Her home had no electricity and she was burned by the kerosene lamp that provided her family with light. The scars were so severe that her thighs healed together and her mother was preparing her to enter a convent because she assumed her daughter would never be able to have children.

"We were able to reconstruct her and get her legs apart and when I came out and told her mother that she would be able to walk normally and bear children in the future, her mother broke down and started crying," Busuito said. "It's stories like that and experiences like that really drive you to go back and do it again and that's just one example."



STAFF PHOTO BY HILL BRESLER

Preparations: Jan Glovak gets ready to leave on her mission to Mexico.

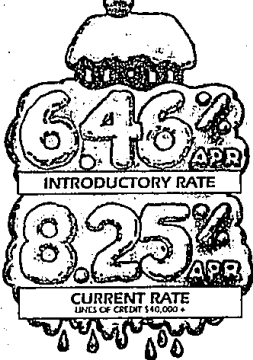
He tells another story about a 6-year-old Mexican girl who had a very large cleft palate. She whimpered constantly after the surgery and while she was recovering, a nurse asked her mother to bring one of her baby dolls to hold. The mother

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Intense: Jan Glovak works in an operating room in a hospital in Mexico.

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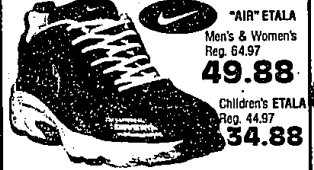
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