

# Nurse to join medical team in Honduras

Will assist 100 others in aid effort

By Susan Buck  
staff writer

Registered nurse Mary Skrocki of Botsford General Hospital in Farmington Hills will accompany a 100-member medical team in March to Honduras — an area where life expectancy is just under 59 years of age.

Skrocki, a Farmington Hills resident, will assist the eye team.

Honduras is a Central American country about the size of Tennessee, with a population of 3 million. According to Skrocki, Honduras has an infant mortality rate of 78 babies per thousand compared to the U.S. infant mortality rate of 10-12 babies per thousand.

By 1990, Honduras had seven physicians per 100,000 people compared to 200 physicians per 100,000 people in the United States, said Skrocki.

When Skrocki arrives in the Honduras, she will enter an area high in parasitic infection.

"No assignments are made ahead of time," said Skrocki. "Some of the people who come for medical treatment come from miles and miles around. It takes two or three days to get to where the medical team will be."

Skrocki views the trip as a long-awaited personal growth experience, an opportunity to give back to her profession and a chance to assist an area of great need.

SKROCKI is headed to the town of LaCeiba with other volunteers of the Medical Group Missions Program (MGM), an overseas arm of the Christian Medical Society.

MGM has four Honduras projects annually: Tegucigalpa in January and February; LaCeiba in March; a surgical project (June and July); and a fall project in November.

The LaCeiba project will focus on dental and medical needs. Volun-

teers will be split into groups.

March 4-18, Skrocki will either be in the field or at work in the hospital compound. She's soliciting eyeglasses donations from the public and assembling surplus supplies from Botsford hospital to take to Honduras.

MGM expects to see up to 7,000 patients, three to four clinics will run simultaneously.

Skrocki is paying her own way, \$1,000, and must bring her own personal supplies. She is picking up the costs of transporting medical supplies by mail to an area graced by a beautiful natural environment but cursed by economic and political unrest.

"People and the animals bathe in the same streams and drink out of the same water so there is a high percentage of parasite infestation," said Skrocki. "There's limited technology and, in many cases, you can't even do I.V. therapy there because you don't have the sterile surroundings."

SKROCKI'S MEDICAL efforts will be specifically directed toward the eye team, headed by Dr. Art Wierenga, a Jackson ophthalmologist and family friend who persuaded Skrocki to make the trip.

He invited her two previous times. The third time, last year, she accepted the challenge.

For Wierenga, who has made the trip since 1974, the dire Honduran situation is nothing new. "Because this is Mary's first visit, her head will be turned by the circumstances she sees there," he said. "When you are a repeater, like I am, you begin to interpret the situation."

Many of the Honduran people who live on the outskirts do not even know about the Nicaraguan situation. "Think back to what communication was like in the early days of our country and you will get an idea of what I mean," he said.

"Rather than sending bucks, I'd like to see more nurses and doctors donate their time there," said Wierenga.

Skrocki's husband, Ralph, assistant superintendent for Clarencville school, continues to be concerned for her safety but has resigned himself to her mission. He finds some consolation in that she will be with a



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Mary Skrocki, a registered nurse at Botsford General Hospital, with some of the donated medical supplies she will take to Honduras. The supplies were donated by the Farmington Hills hospital.

trusted friend who will watch over her like a brother.

"I have mixed feelings," he admitted. "But it's something she wanted to do for humanity."

THE COUPLE has a blended family — Ralph's children, Tom Skrocki, 38; Sue Boyt, 34; Ann Cooper, 30; and Mary's children, David Skrocki, 28; Frank Skrocki, 25, and Christine Tooley, 24.

Skrocki is working toward a master's degree in nursing at Madonna College, Livonia. A recent paper she wrote on the cross-comparison of the United States health care system and the Republic of Honduras helped persuade her to make the trip.

"Although Honduras is a poor country, it has been remarkably generous to refugees from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala," she wrote in the paper. "Regional instability and violence have led more than 42,000 other Central American citizens to take refuge in Honduras."

In addition, her paper states: "In May 1985, the Pediatric Forum reported a polio epidemic in the Honduras. Up to 100 reported cases per month. This is occurring despite the approximately \$2 billion in United States aid that has poured into the region in recent years although, unquestionably, most of that has gone into military expenditure."

"A caveat, both ironic and revealing, is that Nicaragua has sent Honduras their top immunization experts plus 50,000 doses of poliovirus vaccine to help them fight their way out of the devastating epidemic."

Skrocki, a unit manager on Botsford's fifth floor, further illustrated the tremendous need in Honduras.

"There is a high level of illiteracy there, so Dr. Wierenga asked one woman why she wanted eyeglasses if she couldn't read. She replied, 'So I can pick out the worms from the rice,'" said Skrocki.

# Appointment fray ends with 1 final stand

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

In a continuing fray over mayoral appointments to boards and commissions, Farmington Hills city councilman Joe Alkateeb made a last stand Monday in support of planning commissioner Vincent Valvona.

"I think his (Valvona's) name has been dragged through the mud unjustly," Alkateeb said.

The one-term planning commissioner was cleared in November of any conflict of interest in zoning matters with the Carrington Place Apartments for Seniors, at Freedom and Drake, in which he later became a financial partner.

Mayor Terry Sever did not reappoint Valvona to the planning commission Monday, but reappointed him to the building authority.

Still, Valvona's name brought two abstentions in the final vote. The first was from councilwoman Jean Fox. "I cannot support it. I will not vote against it. But I will abstain on that one (Valvona's appointment to the building authority)," Alkateeb abstained from voting on all of Sever's recommended appointments to various boards and commissions because "the truth — the truth — has suffered a major blow on the way to these appointments."

THOUGH ALKATEEB offered his opinions on Sever's intention not to reappoint Valvona to the planning commission at a special Feb. 4 study session, he reiterated his feelings Monday, with Sever's blessings.

"I certainly would accept that, except what I don't like Mr. Alkateeb is the approach in which you're leaving it open," Sever said. "If you have some comments to make with regard to the process or the decision, I would prefer that you be specific and be open and if it's necessary for me to defend a decision or something I've done that is improper, we should get it resolved tonight."

Alkateeb said he was happy to put his concerns on the record.

"I strongly believe Mr. Valvona was railroaded off the planning commission. He was told in regard to his letter of wishing to be reappointed that he will not be reappointed; that it's better for him to resign," said Alkateeb, who appointed Valvona to the planning commission in 1986.

As a result of a conversation with Sever, Valvona sent a second letter asking not to be reappointed "because he did not want his name dragged in the mud," Alkateeb said.

City councilwoman Jean Fox denied Alkateeb's allegation that she has continued to bring up "charges" against Valvona regarding the conflict of interest issue.

"Tonight is another example of absolute, unjustified hatred, disrespect to somebody who has served this city very well," Alkateeb said, referring to Valvona's name being separated from other appointees to allow Fox to abstain and support the others.

"YET, BECAUSE of whims, hatred and unjustified vendettas, this man is being singled out and I don't think anybody on any board or commission in this entire city should be treated so inaccurately, so unjustly," Alkateeb continued.

Valvona has refused to publicly discuss his not being reappointed to the planning commission or the commission surrounding it.

Sever defended his appointments. "I went for the best possible appointments. They were not political choices or friends of mine. I believe Mr. Valvona is certainly a very honorable person and a very just person. He is good for the city. He will do a good job on the building authority. And I know he wrestled with the fact of whether he wanted or not to continue doing that (serving on the building authority)."

Though he said he felt Valvona was a good planning commissioner, Sever added, "I think the city also needs balance." The mayor said he wanted to ensure that all segments of the city were represented. Valvona's replacement, Don Millington, lives on the west side of the city. Valvona lives east of Orchard Lake Road, near city councilmen Alkateeb and Ben Marks, as well as planning commissioner Jeri Houthouten.

Sever said the city charter gives the mayor authority to appoint. Valvona is the only one of 18-20 appointments made by Alkateeb that Sever decided not to reappoint.

Councilman Aldo Vagnozzi defended Sever. "What I've seen in the last several weeks has been a very thorough effort on the part of the mayor and a very open effort to try to put together a good list of appointments."

# Death raises a new issue of nursing home funding

By Casey Hans  
staff writer

A Farmington woman who moved her mother from one nursing home to another is still grieving from her mother's Christmas Day death after complications from a stroke.

She believes inadequate care in the state's nursing care system contributed to her mother's death, according to a complaint filed in January with Citizens for Better Care, a consumer advocacy group.

"I've tried to be objective," said Doris Austerberry, a widow and mother of five.

Austerberry has had experiences with homes in Westland, Riverview, Novi and most recently at Oak Hill Care Center in Farmington. She sent a copy of her complaint to the Observer.

"I UNDERSTAND the problems there have in caring for the elderly. I think the answer is a different system in this country," she said. "I think our legislators will be looking at this."

"The things that make me angry are the things that can be changed," Austerberry's elderly mother, Edra Maude Decker, died at Bots-

ford General Hospital in Farmington Hills following health complications last December. She was living at Oak Hill before being admitted to the hospital.

Officials from Oak Hill did not return phone calls to comment on the complaint, which alleges understaffing and inadequate care.

"I hope something is done to improve care for our elderly; they deserve better," Austerberry said in her complaint.

ONE LOCAL state legislator believes some of the problems are financial, because nursing care providers get financing from the state through a formula debated each spring.

"The main issue is the reimbursement," said state Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills. "There's no question this issue is a very important one. There's no way you can hold costs . . . to a level that will stand still. Programs and other things get cut."

Faxon said he expects the issue to be debated again this spring. In Faxon's many years in the state Legisla-

ture, he said the system gets "millions" more each year, but it only means a small increase for each provider.

"It's always a hot political issue," he said.

FRESHMAN STATE Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, agrees the financing is a concern, but she is looking in other legislative directions. Other states have laws requiring in-state nursing home ownership, which she plans to research.

"I'd like to find out more about it," she said.

Legislatively, state senators and representatives can do little, unless new laws need to be enacted as demanded by constituents or recommended by public health agencies, Faxon said.

Much patient help comes from advocacy groups such as Citizens for Better Care, which handled some 900 complaints during a recent three-month period from residents in nursing homes in a seven-county area.

"If you believe the government's figures, Michigan is doing better than average, and that isn't great," said Susan Rourke, Michigan executive director of CBC.

# Under fire Alkateeb defends council absences

Continued from Page 1

state Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, Monday.

DEFENDING HIS absences, Alkateeb said he had a prior commitment the night of the joint meeting and couldn't make Monday's special meeting with legislators.

Alkateeb told Silver he welcomes constructive criticism.

"But criticism that is incorrect, not right or plain innuendo, is not welcome," he said. "If you just want to pick on me, more power to you."

ALKATEEB'S ATTENDANCE has been a topic of debate among

some city council members as well as a small group of council watchers. The top vote-getter in the November 1987 council election, Alkateeb has been absent six of the 20 scheduled Monday night city council meetings from July to Jan. 23. He also missed two joint meetings with the parks and recreation commission.

Alkateeb has said that he missed some of the council meetings because of illness. He missed others because he didn't care to attend or because his work demanded his time, he has said.

Alkateeb also has threatened to resign at least twice since last Aug-

ust. The first time was the night residents announced their awareness of councilman Ben Marks' then-unpaid \$17,000 sewer tap-in fee. The second and most recent threatened resignation was in late January when Mayor Terry Sever's intention not to reappoint planning commissioner Vince Valvona was publicized.

Councilman Aldo Vagnozzi criticized Alkateeb's behavior at the Feb. 4 study session.

"Your antics haven't helped. I mean you walked out of one meeting. You almost walked out of another meeting. You're threatening to resign every time at the drop of a hat."

# MID-WINTER LINEN SALE

## 25-50% Off

Cotton Comforter Covers, Flats, Fitteds, Pillowcases and Shams

## Our Annual Custom Sewing Sale

## 15-25% Off

thru February 28, 1989

Featherbeds and Blankets also on Sale!

258-6670  
Mon.-Sat. 10-5:30  
Thurs. 10-9

**Scandia Down Shops**  
Come feel the Scandia difference.™

The Plaza of Birmingham • 210 S. Woodward at Merrill  
across from the Birmingham Theatre • Birmingham