

FAITH & VALUES 3B

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2008

FAITH IN ACTION

VU expands its medical reach

Doctors, nurses visit Guatemala to help children

By Cheryl Tatum
FOR THE TENNESSEAN

The doctors and nurses at the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt regularly use their professional skills to improve the lives of children in the Southeast.

But their reach recently extended past the borders of the United States as a group of 16 staff members took their skills to Guatemala City, Guatemala, where they performed surgeries on children with facial birth defects or head, face or neck growths.

The trip, hosted by the Shalom Foundation, a nonprofit that provides financial support and physical assistance for underprivileged children and their families, is the fourth for staff members from the Nashville hospital, and the third for surgeon Steve Goudy.

"We saw children ranging in age from 2 months to 15 to 16 years old," Goudy said, adding that much of their work was cleft palate and lip repair.

The surgeon, who has been at Vanderbilt for three years, said he saw some of the same patients from previous trips on the weeklong mission that began Sept. 27.

"It was great to see their progress," Goudy said. "We have been able to develop continuing relationships. We have become a part of their families."

It's a way to give back

Goudy said the overwhelming needs of the country persuaded him to participate in the mission trip.

"It is a part of our calling as physicians to give back. I can use my talents to really help



Dr. Maria Wittkopf, Dr. Sheila Cofer and Kate Rafferty from Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt performed numerous surgeries on children ranging from 2 months to 16 years old during their medical mission trip to Guatemala in September.



Maria Jose de Gallardo, who works for the Shalom Foundation in Guatemala, holds a baby scheduled for cleft lip surgery.

If we don't go, it might not get done," the surgeon said.

Lori Groves, an operating room charge nurse at the Nashville hospital, agreed.

"I have a great career and wanted to give something back," Groves said.

She said helping children who might not otherwise have a chance in life gives added meaning to her work.

While this was the Hermitage nurse's second trip to Guatemala, she has been involved with all the Vander-

bilt mission trips, handling their planning and logistics.

According to Groves, planning for a weeklong mission begins four months ahead of time. Members of the medical team must take most of the supplies they will need with them through customs.

"We pack up an operating room and move it," Groves said.

For the Vanderbilt team, this mission to Guatemala had an added benefit — it was a homecoming for a little girl who had become part of the hospital family. 2-year-old Joseline Vasquez.

After three months of procedures and one marathon surgery at Vanderbilt for Joseline, the little girl and her mother, Veronica Santuy, returned home to Guatemala with the mission team.

Goudy first saw Joseline, who had a mass on her neck almost the size of her head, during his December 2007 mission to Guatemala, when

she was just 6 months old.

While the mass was not cancerous, it made eating, breathing and even moving her neck difficult.

She and her mother traveled to Vanderbilt with the help of the Shalom Foundation in late June for a series of successful surgeries.

"It was great to get her home so she could reconnect with her family," Goudy said, adding that the little girl is much improved.

Goal is long-term

Now, the hospital and the Shalom Foundation are looking for ways to provide a stable medical environment for the children of Guatemala.

Foundation officials have initiated a capital campaign to purchase and refurbish a hospital in Guatemala City to serve as a permanent home to the program.

The goal is to raise nearly \$1.5 million for a 12,000-square-foot facility with three operating rooms, 17 recovery beds, five preoperative beds and other facilities.

Hospital officials also announced a \$75,000 contribution to the campaign.

In addition to providing a high-quality environment for medical treatment, having a permanent facility will solidify the Guatemalans' partnership with Vanderbilt's doctors and nurses and help them develop the relationships needed to provide comprehensive care, Goudy said.

"This will become an international post for other surgical teams as well, beyond Vanderbilt," added Amy Casseri, chief community and business development officer for Children's Hospital.

"We liked the fact the Shalom's goal is a long-term one: to bring teaching resources along with the proper facilities to help train Guatemalan medical personnel so that high-level care is permanent."