Honoring Two Decades of Compassionate Care

Raising nearly $10,000 to benefit M.O.S.T., dedicated volunteers and supporters attended a special reception to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the outreach program. M.O.S.T. volunteers Sylvia and Tom Vecchione, M.D., hosted the event on Sept. 28, 2008, which entertained more than 125 guests.

Tom Vecchione, M.D., and his wife, Sylvia, welcome guests to the M.O.S.T. 20th anniversary celebration at their home.

Fondest M.O.S.T Memories

“I just love being part of a team of caring people that works together to change the lives of so many. These blessed children now have the opportunity to improve their lives in ways we take for granted, like being allowed to go to school or get a job when they grow up,” says Sister JoCeal Young, a Sister of Mercy who has been prepping M.O.S.T. patients for surgery since 1996.

“I’m always so joyfully overwhelmed when I watch a mother see her child for the first time after reconstructive surgery. I witness the moment where their lives are forever changed, for the better,” says Maria Heimpel, who has been translating instructions to patients’ mothers in the M.O.S.T. post-operative area for 20 years.

“I will never forget seeing a woman who smiled for the first time in many years after we performed a surgery that relieved her painful eye condition. A year later, she came to visit M.O.S.T. volunteers when we were back in her area. She had been married and was attending school; a life changed by M.O.S.T.,” says Sandy Kohler, orthoptist, who has been performing M.O.S.T. eye exams since 2002.
Message from M.O.S.T. President

Reflecting on the past 20 years of M.O.S.T., we feel blessed that the dream of a few committed and passionate people has grown into something so wonderful. When we began, we had no financial resources and no medical staff, just a special calling to help those in need. Through the generous outpouring of community support during the past two decades, a multitude of M.O.S.T. volunteers from numerous hospitals and specialties have profoundly changed the lives of more than 8,000 children and adults in Mexico.

We are grateful to our generous donors and volunteers who have always given from the heart. You are the foundation of our success. Looking to the future, we realize the need continues to grow. It now costs $250 to perform each reconstructive surgery. Considering the expense of sending our volunteer surgical team to remote villages in Mexico, that’s still a small price to pay to brighten a child’s future. We’ve touched so many lives, and there is still work to do. In Mexico alone, an estimated 100,000 children need reconstructive surgeries to repair their cleft lips or palates, or other conditions. The good word has spread and requests for our services now pour in from around Central America.

As you prepare to celebrate this holiday season, may a spirit of generosity for blessings you’ve received inspire you to create a difference in a child’s life. Supporting M.O.S.T. through a gift or volunteering your time and talents can bring hope to a child in need.

To learn more about M.O.S.T. and how you can support its medical missions, call 619-686-3633 or visit www.scripps.org/mercymost.
With a common spirit of caring, dedicated physicians, nurses, pharmacists, interpreters and volunteer members of the Mercy Outreach Surgical Team (M.O.S.T.) bring hope to children in some of the poorest regions of Mexico. This year, M.O.S.T. celebrates its 20th year of performing life-changing surgeries to correct cleft lips, cleft palettes, burn scars, crossed eyes and a variety of other conditions.

Nearly 3,000 M.O.S.T. volunteers have experienced the joy of helping transform the lives of children and adults in need. From calming anxious patients to rejoicing with grateful parents, the medical missions have profoundly impacted our dedicated volunteers.

Working as a M.O.S.T. volunteer for two decades, Douglas Arbon, M.D., has experienced many heart-warming moments. His fondest memory is of a young boy who went to extreme lengths to have his cleft lip repaired.

"Families often walk together for days just so we can help their children," says Dr. Arbon. “But this very determined 8-year-old boy walked all by himself for three days just to reach us. The significance of his journey was overwhelming.”

Molly Schmeltzer, R.N., has also been a volunteer since the early days of M.O.S.T. She feels a special connection to the families of our patients.

“The parents look at us with such want, need and hope,” she says. “They hand over their children to us because they trust we will fix them. It’s a very spiritual experience for me.”

Larry McCarthy, M.D., says he experiences a similar higher calling as a result of his involvement. He has been a M.O.S.T. volunteer surgeon since 1988.

“After a week of operating on 20 or 30 children, I am always grateful that I was able to use my God-given talents to make a positive change in their lives,” he says. “By helping others, I feel I’m fulfilling my purpose of being here.”

Volunteers Who Have Traveled on 30 or More M.O.S.T. Missions

- Douglas Arbon, M.D.
- Ricardo Escandon
- Sara Hernandez, L.V.N.
- Larry McCarthy, M.D.
- George Ochoa
- Patricia Robinson, R.N.
- Molly Schmeltzer, R.N.
- Thomas Vecchione, M.D.
- Jordan Waldman, M.D.
For 20 years, M.O.S.T. has been changing lives of both the patients who receive treatment and the volunteers who provide comfort and care. Passionate about helping others, co-founders Pat Robinson, R.N., and the late Judy Hames, R.N., first planned out M.O.S.T. on a paper napkin. It has since developed into an international program that provides needed medical care to thousands of children and adults.

Pat and Judy never imagined that M.O.S.T. would evolve to a program that has provided life-changing care to more than 8,000 people.

“It’s overwhelming at how many children we’ve helped,” says Pat. “We just never thought we would have such a far-reaching effect. When the parents hand me their child for surgery, I sometimes wonder what I did to deserve such trust.”

When M.O.S.T. first began, patients traveled to Scripps Mercy Hospital for treatment during “Mercy Day,” a special day when complimentary surgical care was provided to those who might not otherwise receive it. Volunteers also traveled to Mexico to perform surgeries during short, weekend trips.

Today, all M.O.S.T. missions are delivered in Mexico. Each year, volunteers provide care during three weekend trips in Tijuana. The team also conducts weeklong missions in some of the most remote areas of the country, treating nearly 250 patients during each trip.

Although M.O.S.T. has helped thousands of children and adults throughout the years, volunteers believe the need is great and there is still more work to be done.

“We want to expand M.O.S.T. to help children of other nations, as well as continue our work in Mexico,” says Pat. “We all feel blessed to be part of this wonderful mission that has such a great impact on so many lives and want to take it one step further.”

Fulfilling a Shared Passion to Help Those in Need

M.O.S.T. Accomplishments

1988 – First Mercy Day at Scripps Mercy Hospital
1992 – Group reorganized as Mercy Outreach Surgical Team (M.O.S.T.)
1994 – “A Mission of Mercy,” a film by Medical Impact and Mary Colacicco
1996 – M.O.S.T. becomes a committee of Mercy Hospital Foundation
1997 – Achievement Citation Special Recognition Award, presented by Catholic Healthcare Association
1998 – Philosophy in Action Award, Value of Justice, presented by Catholic Healthcare West
1998 – Award for Humanitarianism toward the people of Tijuana, presented by the Mayor of Tijuana
2000 – Peacemaker Award, presented by the San Diego Mediation Center
2001 – 2000 Humanitarian Award presented by the San Diego Press Club
2001 – “Trip to Tehuacan,” a documentary by Gina Vecchione, Ane Vecchione and Julie Stivers
2006 – “Miracles in Tula,” a Christian documentary by Pacific Media Ministry
2008 – The 8,000th M.O.S.T. patient helped in Tijuana, Mexico
2008 – “Trip to Tula,” a documentary by Nurse TV

M.O.S.T. co-founder Pat Robinson, R.N., cares for a young patient.
Our Supporters

M.O.S.T. wishes to thank the following individuals and organizations for their generosity. If errors or omissions exist, please call Valerie Carbone at 619-686-3568.

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Transforming Lives
One Couple Making a Difference

Having been involved with M.O.S.T. since its beginning, Sara and Sal Hernandez have many special memories of their medical missions to Mexico. Having helped thousands of children, they have made personal connections that will always be treasured.

Sara, a licensed vocational nurse, volunteers in the post-operative area where she experiences the moment when parents see their child’s face for the first time.

“It’s a gift to see parents celebrate with tears of joy when they see their child’s life has been improved,” says Sara. “Their children are now as beautiful to others as they always are to them.”

During the past 20 years as M.O.S.T. volunteers, Sara and Sal have been moved by the transformations of many children, and one little girl will always be very dear to them. Lupita was severely burned at 6-months-old, and nearly 12 years later, she continues to need reconstructive surgeries.

“M.O.S.T.’s mission of hope and opportunity has a powerful ripple effect,” says Sal, who collaborates closely with Mexican authorities to schedule and coordinate the outreach trips.

“The surgeries allow children to experience a new confidence – being accepted by their family, neighbors and the entire community,” concludes Sara. “It’s so rewarding for us to be part of this.”

The Mission of M.O.S.T.

During the past two decades, hundreds of M.O.S.T. volunteers have worked endless hours, providing life-changing medical care to more than 8,000 children and adults. The far-reaching impact of our program would not be possible without your philanthropic support. Thanks to your generosity, M.O.S.T. is able to carry out our mission to:

• bring hope, comfort and the opportunity for a better life to children and adults through corrective surgery;
• share medical knowledge and expertise with colleagues in a host country; and
• provide an opportunity for team volunteers to experience the spiritual rewards of service.

Whether it is $250 to support one child’s surgery, $10,000 to sponsor a two-day mission, or $100,000 to sponsor a weeklong mission, gifts of all sizes help provide care that offers our patients a brighter future.

To learn how you can support our medical missions, please call 619-686-3633 or visit www.scripps.org/mercymost.

Upcoming M.O.S.T. Missions

Tijuana, Feb. 6 – 7, 2009
Zamora, April 19 – 25, 2009
Tijuana, June 5 – 6, 2009