

March 15, 2006

MEXICO MEDICAL MISSION

By Madeleine Clark, Chair
Mexico Connection Committee
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Our Rotary International project really began at the end of 2001 when Castroville Rotarian Francisco Casas and future Rotarian Cosme Padilla decided to organized a humanitarian mission of their own. Cosme, a retired firefighter, and Francisco, a native of Mexico, started working on a project to provide communities in Mexico with badly needed medical supplies and fire engines. They traveled to Mexico and contacted agency representatives and elected officials to best determine how they could work together to provide much needed assistance to our Mexican neighbors in the state of Guanajuato.

Very soon the fire equipment and medical supplies were delivered but now Rotary was brought into the mix. Francisco's long-time friend and fellow Rotarian, Mike Hutchinson of the Salinas Club, and vice-president of professional services at Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital, recognized that Rotary International could make a real difference in both our communities in California and Guanajuato.

After careful consideration it was decided that Castroville and Salinas Rotary Clubs would pool their resources and apply for matching grants from District 5230 and The Rotary Foundation to finance procurement of desperately needed cardiac medical equipment for Irapuato General Hospital in Guanajuato. Not only would monitoring and defibrillator devices be provided, the total package would also include all accessories, connector kits, wall mounts, installation and medical staff training.

Under the leadership and direction of Steve Carew, chair of Salinas Rotary International, the project was organized when each club formed a "Mexico Connection" committee. The purpose of the committees was to garner support and facilitate the long-term goal of improving relations with Mexicans, not only in Mexico, but also here locally. With the concept of Commerce, Culture, Children, Charity and Collaboration (5 C's) in mind to instigate true exchanges between our countries, the Mexico Medical Mission was on its way. Both clubs anticipate this will be the first of many Mexico projects.

Castroville Rotary Club contributed \$5000. Salinas Rotary Club donated \$15,000. District 5230 provided \$10,000 and The Rotary Foundation supplied a matching grant of \$30,000. Assist International, an organization that networks resources with world needs, was contacted. Assist International has partnered with a number of Rotary Districts to do major medical projects in at least ten countries around the world.

Bob Pagett, president of Assist International went on an assessment trip with Salinas Rotary Club members in January of 2005 and met with the Director of Health, Ector Jaime Ramirez Barba, MD, who endorsed the project for cardiac medical equipment for Irapuato General Hospital in Guanajuato. The hospital is the only hospital in the region that specializes in cardiology diseases. The hospital needs eight outstanding cardiac care monitors placed in the intensive care unit where they presently have none. This will give the hospital the capability to release patients from the critical care unit after two or three days and place them in the intensive care unit for further observation.

This means that rather than staying in the critical care unit for an average of seven days, it will reduce stays to three to four days, which will open the unit to more critical care patients. Irapuato General Hospital is a regional hospital that serves an area of approximately 3 million residents.

Assist International and the Rotary Clubs of Salinas and Castroville will also partner with Salinas Valley Memorial Health Care Systems to provide the biomedical engineering, equipment installation and the cardiology training team to oversee the implementation of the entire project. A statewide education program will also take place at the same time in the capitol city of Guanajuato. The equipment is purchased from Stanford Medical Center and refurbished to like-new condition. Assist International will warrantee the equipment for one year but will keep in close contact with the hospital for years to come. The total value of the package is worth well over a quarter of a million dollars.

The equipment and supplies are scheduled for delivery at the end of March 2006. A medical team staff of 20 from Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital will precede Rotarians to Irapuato to begin installation of the medical equipment at the hospital. A celebratory dinner will be held upon completion of the project. Visiting Rotarians from California will be staying in the homes of their Mexican Rotarian contemporaries and will be able to experience first hand the famous hospitality of Mexico's people. We will also visit the University in Guanajuato City with Ed Valeau, president of Hartnell Community College, to arrange for future cultural exchanges. Guanajuato City offers excellent artworks, architecture, sightseeing, shopping, history and wonderful food. Hopefully, this is only the beginning of a long and mutually beneficial relationship between fellow Rotarians in District 5230 and Guanajuato, Mexico.

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