

Panama Missions

December 2019 News Update

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Panama Missions Loses a "Mission Hero" in Dr. Joe Wilhite

Dr. Joe L. Wilhite, a "mission hero" in Panama, passed away in Memphis on August 22, 2019, at age 89.

Dr. Wilhite, a retired cardiothoracic surgeon, made his first medical missions trip to Panama in 2000. He was 71 years old. Although he retired in 1994 from his Memphis surgical practice, Dr. Joe kept his medical skills sharp by working as an E. R. physician, first in Lucedale, Miss., and then in Lexington, Tenn.

For 15 years, Dr. Joe made two trips annually to Panama where he developed a passion for medical missions. He found medicine quite different in Panama. "People would wait patiently for hours to be seen by one of us. I saw conditions that I had **only read about** in medical textbooks," he once commented.

Wife, Millie, accompanied him on many of the trips, working primarily in the pharmacy.

Dr. Wilhite served as Medical Director for Panama Missions for 5 years. Larry Brady recalls, "Joe fell in love with the people of Panama. He would call me several times a week with ideas for making things better."

Dr. Joe was especially positive about the **water filter program**. He said on many occasions that he could see a dramatic improvement in the overall health of a village a year after water filters were provided.

Dr. Joe also shared Larry Brady's passion for **Operation Christmas Joy**. He made presentations to many Lexington area churches of Christ, promoting the project and serving as a regional liaison.

In 2016, Dr. Joe and Millie moved back to Memphis. At the age of 86, he had a few health problems of his own and it was time to fully retire.

Larry Brady gave a beautiful eulogy at Dr. Joe's funeral on August 26. He described his dear friend under these five headings:

- ♦ A man of great generosity ♦ A man of humility
- ♦ A man of great kindness & compassion ♦ A man with a sense of humor ♦ A man to be remembered

Two of his mission co-workers reflect:



Dr. Joe saw everyone as a person, not just a patient with a certain disease. He would ask their name and what they did everyday. Doc was one of the best men I have ever met and a great friend and mentor for me.

Jesse Box Stanfill, NP



Top and clockwise: 1. Dr. Joe Wilhite leads his medical team up from a river landing to set up a medical clinic in a remote Indian village in 2011. 2. Dr. Joe receives "payment in full." 3. Millie and Joe enjoy a baby.



Dr. Joe was "one of a kind" and a genuinely caring man, full of laughter. He loved taking care of patients in the worst conditions, and I never heard him complain. The children were his passion. You could find him circled by them as he passed out candy.

Many times he would look at Millie and say, "Mama, can we take this one home?"

Diane Edrington, CRNP



SCHEDULE FOR 2020

January 31 - February 7

Vision/Medical Team to Meteti

Leader: Dr. Russ Burcham, Denver Ophthalmologist

February 28 - March 8

Medical Mission to Sambu (Remote Embera Village)

Leader: Diane Edrington, CRNP, Long Beach, Miss.

April 24-May 2 & July 17-25

Evangelistic Missions to Santa Fe

Leader: Jerry Ervin, Cornerstone Church, Florence, Ala.

Contact Larry Brady for details about these and other trips.

Summer 2019 Brought Workers to Panama for Several Projects



June 2019 Summer mission efforts involved medical, dental, VBS, evangelistic, humanitarian and clinic maintenance workers from Crestview, Fla., Columbia, Tenn., Long Beach, Miss. and Luverne, Montgomery, Davenport, Hope Hull, Ala.



Diane Edrington, CFNP

Top, Clockwise: People wait patiently to see a medical professional and receive vital medications; teens help pour a concrete floor for a needy family; Crystal Eagerton prepares to provide dental hygiene to many; Emily Grace Turner and Mary Jo Hoffman are part of the VBS team.



NEWS & NOTES

Larry Brady had a profitable trip to Panama in September to meet with the new Sub Director of the Sentafront border police. Commissioner Roger Mojica committed to providing transportation and security for all of Panama Missions' humanitarian and evangelistic programs in the Darien. **"It's good for people to know about Jesus," he commented.**

Diane Edrington and Mark Hodges of Long Beach, Miss., and Raul Cabrera of Sambu, Panama, met with Panama's Minister of Health in November, seeking government support for the medical work Panama Missions has initiated among remote Embera communities in the Comarcas Province. Comarcas officials presented Panama Missions to the Minister of Health as **"the only medical team that has volunteered to help our people, and has returned as promised."**

The medical team plans to return to the region in February 2020. Edrington, team leader, is a Certified Family Nurse Practitioner and a 25-year veteran of medical missions to Panama.

Raul Cabrera of Sambu will coordinate the mission team's efforts in his community, Feb.28 - March 8. Raul continues to distinguish himself among Embera Indians in Panama. He recently achieved his goal of becoming the **first Embera pilot.** Raul is a faithful Christian who participates in almost every mission effort in Panama.



Christmas Joy Team Working in Panama

Larry Brady and a small team from the U.S. arrived in Panama on December 2 to begin the distribution of Operation Christmas Joy 2019. You can "follow the action" by checking **Larry's Facebook page** throughout December.



Panamanians unload the 2019 OCJ container in Sanson prior to Larry Brady's arrival on December 2.

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