

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

People who give

Out of the depths of my feeling of happiness there grew up gradually within me an understanding of the saying of Jesus that we must not treat our lives as being for ourselves alone. Whoever is spared personal pain must feel himself called to help in diminishing the pain of others — Albert Schweitzer

As we approach the end of 2010 with holiday celebrations of giving and thankfulness, my thoughts turn to Pottstown's "world class" givers.

Earlier this year, when I first learned about the earthquake in Haiti,

Pottstown orthopedic surgeon Richard Whittaker came to mind. Dr. Whittaker flew to Thailand in 2005 to treat victims of a catastrophic Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. Not only did Dr. Whittaker spend two weeks treating victims, he raised money after returning home to help rebuild the Thai village he visited.

This time around, sure enough, Dr. Whittaker was off to Haiti within a week of the earthquake with \$1,000 in donations and medical equipment contributed by the staff at Pottstown Memorial Medical Center. He treated about 50 patients in a week before returning home.

Is any profession more noble than healing the sick and injured? Is any branch of medicine more difficult than surgery?

It takes years of unrelenting mental and physical toil to learn. You can't buy a surgeon's license or get one through family connections. There's no margin for error — mistakes can kill or maim — and if a complication crops up in the operating room, you can't call it a day and come back fresh in the morning. You have to deal with it then and there, no matter how exhausted you are.

I'm personally thankful to Dr. Giancarlo Barolat, a neurosurgeon who freed me from weeks of agonizing pain on March 7, 2002 by removing a herniated disc from my spine. A routine discectomy for him, but life restoration for me.

My highest admiration, therefore, goes to people like Dr. Whittaker: first, because of the extraordinary skill they have acquired through many years of perseverance and sacrifice; and second, for their readiness to fly to third world countries on short notice,

using their ability to alleviate pain and suffering among the most impoverished and desperate people on earth.

Another of my hometown heroes is Dr. Lawrence Kenney, my eye doctor, who periodically flies to a clinic in Mombasa, Kenya, for two weeks at a time, where he does eye examinations, cataract surgery, and treats various eye problems such as infections and glaucoma.

We can't all be healers, but we can all give. I was impressed when my house painter, Matt Savino, asked me and some of his other clients for modest donations to support a project his church undertook to help the needy in the hills of Guatemala.

Savino flew to Guatemala City, then drove north into the jungle to help construct a mission building where food, medical care, and clothing are offered. Last time he was there, his group gave out 300 pairs of shoes. Some people walked eight hours to the mission just to get a pair.

Another way to help the global community is adoption. I am struck by the number of Pottstown School District teachers who have adopted children, such as Robin Huss Anderson, the daughter of our school board president, Rick Huss, who adopted a lovely baby girl from Guatemala.

These are truly win-win undertakings. The children receive love and material necessities as they bring joy to their adoptive families.

We hear lots of complaints about life in Pottstown, but much of the world's population would find Pottstown a heaven on earth.

One billion people have no clean drinking water or basic sanitation, and two billion lack reliable access to electricity. Polls show that Americans, on average, think we allocate about 15 percent of our federal budget to foreign aid. The correct number is about one-half of one percent. Some curmudgeons think even that's too much.

The people I've mentioned — and of course there are many, many others — take personal responsibility for relieving some of the misery in this world. They focus their thoughts on others, and they inspire people around them to do the same. How poor we would all be without them.



Commentary by
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