

Countless people in developing countries enjoy better health because of a project started in Rotary District 6600 in northwest Ohio



The Remarkable Growth of MESA

By Ron Stoner

In 1981, during his training for Governor of then RI District 660, DG Elect **Bob Kuck II** met another DGE, **Abdul Haiy Khan** of Karachi, Pakistan. At that time Russia had just invaded Afghanistan and Pakistan badly needed help in caring for Afghan refugees. DGE Bob promised DGE Khan that he would see if District 660 could help by shipping an ambulance and a medical x-ray unit to Rotarians in Pakistan.

Shipping this aid to Pakistan eventually proved unfeasible, but as DG **Bob Kuck II** made his visits to District Rotary Clubs and described the project he discovered that someone in nearly every club knew of valuable medical equipment sitting unused in storage rooms of local hospitals and clinics.



Rotarians inspect one of the first MESA shipments of medical equipment to Guatemala.

At about the same time, Toledo Rotarian **Dr. Jim Diller** was invited to present a program on Guatemala missions at a meeting of the Waterville Rotary Club. Waterville Rotarian **Fred Dieter** learned about the great need in Guatemala for medical equipment and supplies. As owner of Dieter Materials Handling Fred Dieter was an expert in packaging and shipping delicate instruments, and proposed that shipping medical aid to Guatemala would be a worthy Rotary project. This led Dieter to found International Services of Hope (ISOH), which prepared MESA's earliest shipments abroad.

“Since 1981, millions of dollars in medical equipment have been shipped to countries in need. In addition, over fifty serviceable vehicles have been shipped, including fire engines, ambulances, and school busses.”

These two initiatives coalesced when Bob Kuck II appointed a committee to study a proposal to gather unused medical equipment and supplies from around then District 660 and ship it to needy hospitals and clinics in Central America. The committee, chaired by **Dr. Norman Maxen**

(Van Wert), recommended the formation of **Medical Equipment and Supplies Abroad**. Its stated goal was, “To promote world peace and understanding by providing medical equipment and supplies to areas outside the United States determined to have great need and delivering said equipment and supplies at minimum cost ...”

PDG Glenn Dunbar (left) and PDG Bob Kuck I visiting a turkey farm during one of the early MESA visit to Guatemala.



This was happening as DGE **W. Gary Romp** (Sandusky) was in training to become District Governor in 1982-83. During his training sessions, DGE Romp met a Central American counterpart, **Rolando Duarte** of El Salvador, then Governor Elect of District 424 (now RI District 4240).

Rolando Duarte was a brother of **Jose Napoleon Duarte**, then President of El Salvador. Romp and Rolando Duarte exchanged information on needs in Central America and on the discussions ongoing in District 660 about shipping used medical equipment abroad. This contact with the Duarte brothers opened several doors in Central America that were important for MESA's later development.

MESA was founded in the summer of 1982 during **Gary Romp's** term as District Governor. PDG **Bob Kuck II** was the first MESA Chairman. Other members of the first MESA Committee included **Dr. Marvin Ludwig** (Defiance), **Fred Dieter** (Waterville), PDG **Glen Dunbar** (Toledo), PDG **Robert Kuck I** (New Knoxville), PDG **Ed Miller** (Bowling Green), **Charles Campbell** (Perrysburg), PDG **Zane Bourisseau** (Amherst), PDG **Jack Glick** (Lorain), DGE **Gerald E. Edwards** (Delta), and **Dr. Norman Marxen** (Van Wert). One of the first actions was to incorporate as a nonprofit corporation. **Fred Dieter** donated the expenses of incorporation.



From left: Margo Duarte (wife of PDG Rolando Duarte, who is not pictured), Glen Dunbar, Jose Napoleon Duarte (brother of Rolando Duarte then President of El Salvador), Toledo industrialist Harold McMaster. Photo taken during an early MESA visit to El Salvador.

PDG **Bob Kuck I** had many Guatemalan friends and became an active MESA booster; he organized several of the first trips to Central America by Ohio Rotarians and recruited several other Rotarian supporters. His contacts, together with those made by **Gary Romp** through the Duartes, led to the first MESA trips to Guatemala and El Salvador. A 1983 expedition to Guatemala by District 660 Rotarians bearing medical equipment as gifts was very well received by the Guatemalan government.



Bob Kuck I (right front), George Hoobler (right rear) and Rudy Richter (left front) of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, with others at dinner during an early MESA visit to Central America.

Guatemala became the basis of a videotape that was shown at countless Rotary meetings in the District for several years.

By summer 1984, MESA had already sent four 40-foot sea containers to Guatemala and another four to El Salvador. A fire truck, the first of many emergency vehicles, was donated by the Findlay Rotary Club and shipped to Quetzaltenango, Guatemala in 1986. Regular shipments to Central America became the rule. By 1988, 28 containers had been sent there. By the end of 2001, MESA had shipped 60 containers of aid and 50 emergency vehicles, primarily to Central American countries.

PDG **Glen Dunbar** (Toledo) organized several MESA trips to Central America, often inviting along prominent men from Northwest Ohio, such as the late Toledo Industrialist and philanthropist, **Harold McMaster**. A few of the many MESA activists and visitors to Central America during that

time included **George Hoobler** (Toledo), PDG **Chuck Oswald** (Maumee) and PDG **Herb Kephart** (Van Wert), **Jack Glick** (Lorain) and **Gerald Edwards** Delta).



Stan Kujawa and other Findlay Rotarians with one of the first MESA emergency vehicles sent to Central America. This fire truck is still in use in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.

Early funding of MESA shipping costs came from private donations and from special contributions from about one-third of the clubs in the District. An early private donation of \$50,000 from PDG **Jim Valentine** (Dayton) was crucial for MESA's early survival. Later on, significant funding came from voluntary membership dues payment by all Rotarians in the District. Many Rotarians remember the several golf outings **Glen Dunbar** organized as MESA fundraisers.

PDG **Jack Goodnight** (Lima) became MESA Chairman in 1989, succeeding PDG Bob Kuck II. Goodnight was "Mr. MESA" for many years, until 2002, and remains an active participant and booster. DGE **Steve Day** (Perrysburg) took responsibility for shipping containers of humanitarian aid abroad. **Ben Dansard** (Toledo) and PDG **John Kurfess** (Perrysburg) were responsible for shipping many used emergency vehicles from District 6600 to Central American countries. Rotarians, too numerous to mention, exemplified MESA and "Service Above Self" during that period. During **Jack Goodnight's** tenure as MESA Chairman, regular trips to the annual Uniendo

America Project Fair in Central America by Rotarians became the rule. As Rotaract clubs formed and became active in the District, it became a regular practice for MESA to sponsor a few Rotaractor representatives to the Uniendo meetings. When El Salvador experienced a devastating earthquake in 2001, MESA quickly responded, sending several containers of aid there within a few weeks. The earthquake happened just before the Uniendo conference was to be held in San Salvador. Several District 6600 Rotarians were undeterred by the quake and went anyway to learn what could be done to help.

MESA Chairman Jack Goodnight (at right) and Stephen Keller, President of the Trilby-Toledo Rotary Club inventory medical supplies in the MESA warehouse space in Findlay.



Stan Kujawa became MESA cochairman with **Jack Goodnight** in the 2001-2002 Rotary year and remains MESA chairman today. Through the efforts of PDGs **Chuck Stocking** and **Jim Hunt**, MESA was reorganized and its mission was expanded to include humanitarian aid. Ron Stoner was hired as part-time Director of Operations to coordinate increased MESA activities. MESA began to receive very significant financial assistance for shipping costs from Universal Heart, Inc., of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Findlay Rotarian **Chuck Bills** donated warehouse space and other warehouse and shipping services. At the 2002 District Conference, **Stan Kujawa**, the fourth Chairman of MESA, was recognized as Rotarian of the Year for his institution of an annual car raffle as a very successful MESA fundraiser. The efforts of PDG **Jim Shrader** and **Ron Stoner** to boost and support MESA in numerous visits to Rotary Clubs in the District were recognized at the 2003 District Conference.

During the most recent 2002-2003 Rotary Year, seventeen sea containers of humanitarian aid and six emergency vehicles were gathered in District

6600 and sent to needy people in seven different countries. This represents a growth in MESA activity over the years that could not have been accomplished without the support, monetary and otherwise, of many Rotarians that have not been mentioned in this short history. Thanks to the Rotarians who contributed their knowledge to this short history and to all who continue to support MESA's work.

Ron Stoner*



These rural grade school students in Guatemala are using desks shipped by MESA to them from District 6600.



High school students in Lupeni, Romania, wanted to learn English, but the only English book in their school was *The Works of Shakespeare*. Here they are reading a few of the more than 400 high-school level English books they received from MESA in January 2003.



“This is District 6600's signature program - it needs to be expanded District by District, Zone by Zone until it's a world wide Rotary program.”

District Governor Bill Ruse – 2003/04



The Rotary Club of San Ignacio, Belize, is shown with one of two containers of material MESA sent in Spring 2003. This container had school desks, medical equipment, medical supplies, books, athletic equipment and disposable diapers.

Funds for MESA activities come almost entirely from District 6600 clubs and the semiannual Dues statement includes a requested contribution of \$5 per member. For MESA to operate effectively, it is essential that each club provide at least this level of support. Some clubs contribute even more.

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