Pilot Helps ‘Poorest of the Poor’

In 2002, Paul Connor and his wife Sharon were busy running their Akron, Ohio-based company—Wandering Eyes Optical Equipment Sales and Service. An optician and pilot with commercial, instrument and flight instructor ratings, he’d bought a Cessna Cardinal in 2000 for use in his business.

Then came a meeting that changed his life.

At his church, Anunciation Catholic, a visiting missionary with a non-denominational group, Food for the Poor, held a series of presentations.

“We heard of the terrible plight of the poorest people on earth living in the countries that make up the Caribbean. We were asked if we would contribute enough money ($2,000-$2,500) to have a home built for a family in one of those countries.”

Paul and Sharon agreed to fund the project and found themselves doing the same the following year.

“Five homes later, I was invited to visit Jamaica and personally view both the need and the progress already in place. I worked in a food kitchen, delivered food into the streets, visited shanty communities, saw medical facilities and many other good works Food for the Poor was involved in. The experience changed my life forever.”

When he returned home, he developed a proposal “to build, fund and equip an eye care center.” Food for the Poor accepted the plan, choosing a location in Kingston, Jamaica, for the site.

“Over the next two years a structure was built and equipment was purchased. Space for the optometrist was laid out, an eye glass dispensary was created and an in-house lab was assembled.”

Paul said he trained eight Jamaican students “the fine art of opticianary.” This past November, the Eyecare Center opened for business at St. Pious X Catholic Church Compound.

An optometrist from Naples, Fla., joined the team “and we started by seeing 405 patients in three days. Thirty pairs of glasses were fabricated on site.”

The long-range plan is to send an optician and optometrist on a regular basis to train local residents, whose pay will come from sales of eyeglasses. In U.S. currency, the cost of the exam plus glasses is around $26.

Paul signed up with Angel Flight in 2005. He had learned to fly while he was in the Navy, using the GI bill to get all his ratings.

He learned about Angel Flight through an ad and thought, “Why not try it?”

Paul said he flies from three to five missions a year and would fly more if it weren’t for bad weather, weight restrictions and time limits.

“It’s fun. I enjoy doing it. I’m happy I’m able to be of service.”

(See “Poorest” on page 2)
Community representatives have two new and significant opportunities for outreach.

We are seeking CRs in all states to serve as liaisons with Ronald McDonald Houses. This involves an initial meeting to make the correct contacts and leave literature such as brochures and patient outreach tabletop displays with tear-off pads. The CR is asked to commit to a particular Ronald McDonald House and to follow up on at least a quarterly basis, ensuring the House has ample AF outreach materials on hand at all times.

The second opportunity is to serve as a representative of our Homeland Security Emergency Air Transportation Systems (HSEATS) program at state level VOADs (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters). The VOADs generally host four-hour meetings every quarter. Responsibilities and time commitments for these reps can expect to be increased during times of national disasters.

Please contact Gay Catania, Vice President of Programs, if you are available and interested in serving as a rep on either of these initiatives or to obtain additional information. You can reach her at 757-271-2294 or via email at gcatania@angel-flight.org.

Thank you for all that you do for Angel Flight and those that we serve!