San Diego Doctor Teams Up with SEE International to Fight Preventable Blindness

By Stephen Bunnell for SEE International

SEE International is proud to congratulate Dr. Ann Hornby for a successful surgical expedition to treat blindness in Tecate, Mexico.

During the expedition, which took place on May 17, Dr. Hornby and her fellow volunteer ophthalmologists, or “SEE Docs,” treated 10 individuals suffering from cataracts. This is hardly Dr. Hornby’s first humanitarian trip to Tecate, however — indeed, she has participated in 12 SEE expeditions there since 2009, as well as trips to Bolivia, Peru, Honduras and the Philippines.

The clinic in Tecate is one of SEE’s oldest continuously operating sites; since its foundation in 2005, more than 500 men, women and children have had their sight restored, thanks to the generous volunteer work of SEE Docs.

Dr. Hornby, who boasts over 30 years of experience as an ophthalmologist (and 28 years as a volunteer), does not characterize herself as a particularly risk-loving person.

“I’m sort of a coward,” she confesses ruefully. “I hate heights, and I don’t like extreme sports like rock climbing or motorcycle racing.”

Traveling the world and volunteering her skills to help those who need it the most, however, is her kind of adventure.

“I feel like I’m Indiana Jones when I’m on an expedition!” she exclaims.

Many of Dr. Hornby’s colleagues at work participate in hobbies like skydiving or skiing down black-diamond slopes, but they balk when she tells them that she is going to places like Chiapas to perform free eye operations.
surgeries.

“They say, ‘I would never do that — there are rebels and gangs there! You could get shot!’” she laughs. “I always feel perfectly safe, though. The people are never anything but grateful that we’re there.”

The degree of gratitude that SEE Docs experience from their patients is one of the main reasons why Dr. Hornby continues to volunteer her time, money and energy so freely. On the latest trip to Tecate, one of the patients was a fisherman whose livelihood was threatened by his loss of sight.

Once the doctors removed the cataracts from his eyes, he was so elated that he returned with a load of salted fish for the doctors. Another powerful example took place on a previous expedition to Bolivia. There, Hornby and her fellow SEE Docs treated many poor indigenous people, including a young boy who hadn’t been able to see for two years. He could not read the instructional material in school, so he had to stay home. Once the doctors diagnosed him with cataracts, they were able to remove them quickly and safely. When his operation was finished and they removed his eyepatch, the boy was so excited at being able to see that he sprang to his feet and began to run around the room. His mother instantly burst into tears of joy and gratitude; now her son could go to school and play, like any other child.

Moments like these are what drive great doctors like Hornby, who is herself a mother of three, to spend their valuable time and money on volunteer expeditions with SEE.

“I know that, if one of my children went blind, I would pray for somebody to come offer help,” she reflects. “That’s why I keep volunteering with SEE: because you can be that person for somebody who really needs it.”

— Stephen Bunnell is a communications coordinator for SEE International.

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