

## UM Retiree, Daughter Make Building Medical Center in Togo a Family Affair

Contributed by Edwin Smith  
07/18/2008

University of Mississippi student Zack Brent of Oxford (white shirt) assists Dr. James Speck, staff physician at Student Health Services, and nurse Lisa Bishop as they care for a Togolese man during a recent medical mission trip to the West African country. UM is partnering with a humanitarian relief agency to build a medical and educational center in Togo. Courtesy photo\*\*

OXFORD, Miss. - The first two times Jim Reeves visited Togo, his mission was to help provide medical care for people in desperate need. When the retired University of Mississippi employee returns for a third time next month, his mission is to help build a \$4 million hospital.

And Reeves won't be alone.

Reeves is one of three UM representatives who plan to do preliminary work for the medical facility next month. His daughter, Marni Kendricks, assistant to the dean of the UM School of Engineering, is project manager. Barbara Collier, director of University Health Services, is serving as a medical consultant. The team is traveling to the impoverished West African nation Aug. 6-16 with Torey Herring, president of Global Impact, a humanitarian relief organization based in Prattville, Ala.

Construction on the Grace Medical and Educational Center-Bill Collier Memorial Baptist Hospital is to begin in fall 2009. The hospital project involves a multi-faceted collaboration among the UM Department of Civil Engineering, Global Impact, Mission B.I.G. (Baptiste Indigenouse de la Grace), Grace Baptist Church of Lomé, Togo, and North Oxford Baptist Church.

"If I were 20 years younger, I'd move over there and stay," said Reeves, who retired in 2000 as assistant director of UM's National Food Service Management Institute after 33 years on the university staff. He later served three years as business manager for the Barksdale Reading Institute.

"It is so very rewarding to be able to help people who are truly in need, especially those who are so grateful to Americans for providing a means of physical healing, pain relief, critical infant care, dental care and vision care."

Reeves' primary role during next month's trip is to find and secure the legal counsel, community and government support necessary to guarantee the vision becomes a reality. He anticipates meetings with the U.S. Embassy, Togolese military leaders and chief of the village. He also is seeking a well-drilling company to help find and furnish clean, safe drinking water.

"There is so much work to be done that I wouldn't advise anyone to get involved who isn't committed to it for the long haul," Reeves said. "It will take time to establish standards of proper medical care and operation, but we've got to start somewhere."

Jim Reeves and his daughter, Marni Kendricks, are traveling to Togo next month to start work on a \$4 million hospital in the West African nation. Courtesy photo.

Kendricks has been working with Herring and others to provide engineering design services and project planning. UM senior civil engineering design students created architectural plans for a hospital, which will be incorporated in the final design for Togo facility, she said. Civil engineering faculty members also are contributing expertise in several areas, including environmental, structural, geotechnical and construction management.

"We can't wait to see a finished, beautiful campus with a fully functional medical and education center to provide a place of hope, healing, help and simply grace," Kendricks said.

Waheed Uddin, director of the UM Center for Advanced Infrastructure Technology and faculty adviser for Kendricks' master's thesis in civil engineering, has helped with planning the hospital project.

"It is an honor to be able to provide our services for such a worthy project," Uddin said.

Collier has served on medical mission trips to Brazil, but this will be her first visit to Togo.

"As a nurse practitioner, my role is mainly to see where potential medical staff for the hospital is coming from," Collier said. "In addition to visiting area hospitals and medical schools, I will hopefully be involved in the meetings with the Togolese Minister of Health."

Collier's late husband (for whom the facility is to be named) was instrumental in paving the way for medical teams to serve in Togo. "He also helped launch the first and only Christian radio station in that country," she said.

The vision for the complex began when a medical mission team from north Mississippi churches traveled to Togo in 2004. Following a second and third trip in 2007, the group decided to buy land on faith for development of a hospital.

Following a dedication service on a 2-acre plot last July, the Adankpo Village gave 23.8 acres for the project in November. The team expanded design plans to include a 225-bed medical center, an educational facility for hosting conferences and other training seminars, guest housing for medical staff, a chapel, agricultural areas for growing food and other facilities. Plans call for the campus to be fully developed over a three-year period.

Project management strategic plans are in place for the center to generate enough funds to become self-sufficient within five years, Kendricks said.

The project has garnered support from U.S. Sen. Thad Cochran (R-Miss).

"I was pleased to hear that the University of Mississippi is partnering with charitable groups to undertake a humanitarian project in a region of the world suffering from a lack of basic medical care," Cochran said. "This hospital has the potential

to bring widespread results to an impoverished region."

In June, the university and Global Impact applied for a \$1.5 million grant from U.S. AID, American Hospitals and Schools Abroad Program.

Many faith-based organizations, civic organizations and individuals are contributing to the project. Donors include the Lafayette-Marshall Baptist Association, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, Broadmoor Baptist Church of Jackson, North Oxford Baptist Church, First Baptist Church of Oxford, Spring Hill Baptist Church and First Baptist Church of Abbeville, Ecrú Baptist Church and Lions Club International, as well as many medical professionals and business owners.

"More than \$500,000 worth of volunteer medical services and travel, plus \$100,000 worth of good-condition used and new medical surplus equipment and supplies have already been donated to the project," Kendrick said. "It is evident that God is working out all the details to make this dream a reality. It would not be possible otherwise."

Besides the requested grant money, additional funds are needed. Tax-deductible gifts can be sent to North Oxford Baptist Church Togo Medical Missions, P.O. Box 1700, Oxford, MS 38655.

For more information, visit <http://www.heartfortogo.org> , call 662-234-1101 or e-mail Kendrick