



Rotary District  
**6920**



Lend a Hand

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## M.E.T.S. Container Shipped

The following article appeared in the April 28 issue of the Savannah Morning News, Savannah. Reporter Dana Clark Felty wrote the article.

Retired dentist Bob Ashley has seen America's material abundance contrasted with dire needs in other parts of the world.

Now, the Savannah Rotarian has launched a major effort to try to match the two.

On Tuesday, members of the Rotary

Medical Equipment Transport Service celebrated the opening of the nonprofit group's 2025 Louisville Road medical supply warehouse with a ribbon cutting and speech from Glenn Estess, president-elect of Rotary International.

The warehouse is being used to store retired medical equipment and donated supplies.

METS leaders and volunteers collect, sort and package the items to ship to nonprofit organizations serving mostly the poor in developing countries.

Bob Ashley, left, and Alan Usher look through boxes of donated medical equipment that will be shipped to needy nonprofit medical agencies around the world. Ashley is the founder and director of Rotary District 6920's Medical Equipment Transport Service.

Steve Bisson/Savannah Morning News

In the past year and a half, METS has shipped three 40-foot seagoing containers full of equipment and supplies to parts of Guatemala and Chili.

Ashley hopes to expand the program to reach impoverished people around the world, as

well as the poor and homeless locally.

"We work with some of the poorest, most disenfranchised people in the world, people who really don't have any bootstraps to pull themselves up by," Ashley said.

For the past decade, Ashley has

traveled two to three times a year to developing countries, primarily to Central America but once to Asia.

Anesthesia machines and a ventilator are some of the medical equipment donated to the Rotary District 6920's Medical Equipment Transport Service by the St. Joseph's /Candler Health System. Steve Bisson/Savannah Morning News

In parts of Central America, he saw many people in need of wheelchairs who were forced to drag themselves using skateboards or nothing.

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A container is prepared for shipment



Lend a Hand

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[www.rotarydistrict6920.net](http://www.rotarydistrict6920.net)

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He's seen many more whose health was compromised by malnutrition.

"I'll probably never eat a large meal without thinking it's more than a poor person in Guatemala may eat for two days," he said.

Witnessing the lives of the poor in the world's poorest economies changed his life, he said.

Bob Ashley is the founder and director of Rotary District 6920's Medical Equipment Transport Service.

On some of those same visits to Central America, Ashley saw Rotary Club members trying to help.

"This is an organization I want to work with," Ashley remembers thinking long ago.

The Moultrie-native conceived the project over a year ago through support from Rotary District 6920. Ashley now serves as the grants chairman for the district.

Parts for prosthetic legs, orthotic leg braces and wheelchairs are desperately needed in parts of the world where these items are not accessible to the poor.

Alan Usher is a volunteer working for the Rotary District 6920's Medical Equipment Transport Service.

A fully-assembled prosthetic leg at METS warehouse could cost upwards of \$1,000, Ashley said.

Once enough materials are collected,

Ashley sends an inventory to the recipients developed through Ashley's travels and by word of mouth from other Rotarians.

"We tell them what we have and they tell us if they needed it," Ashley said.

The most recent shipment from a temporary storage facility in Valdosta to Chili including hospital beds and gurneys.

This week, roughly \$1 million worth of hospital beds, operating tables, anesthesia machines, a respirator and prosthetic and orthotic supplies filled up the storage area of the 6,250 square foot warehouse.

Ashley expects the group will ship out two containers in May or June to hospitals in Guatemala.

Receiving organizations are asked to cover the shipping costs – estimated between

\$1,500 to \$5,000 per container.

But METS volunteers will help programs find a sponsor if it can't pay.

The project only accepts sterile items – no pharmaceuticals, liquids or supplies that have been in contact with bodily fluids.

Rotary District 6920 pays for the warehouse's utilities and office supplies and – in

the near future – will cover a full-time warehouse manager.

Two anonymous donors paid up the lease on the warehouse through the next five years. Ashley hopes METS will acquire a donated warehouse or buy one before the lease runs out.

Rotarian Allen Usher said he volunteers because he

believes the program is the most efficient he's seen. That's because the contacts in other countries are made through Rotarians.

"We know our contacts are like-minded people," he said. "So, you know the items are going directly to the people who need it."



*RI President-Elect Glen Estess Sr. (center) joins Bob Ashley and DG Leon Benefield in the ribbon cutting ceremonies at the warehouse that will house donated equipment.*

Dear Joe and Paty:

We have received the shipment of medical equipment today, Wednesday. The large salon in our Rotary house is filled to capacity. The Rotary house is being used as temporary storage because we must wait for a resolution from Chilean Customs to authorize the entry of these items into the country duty free since they are used medical equipment. It is a mere bureaucratic procedure but it takes some time, somewhere between 20 and 60 days. I like to let you know that the stars of the shipment are the six gurneys donated by South Georgia Medical Center. They are excellent gurneys and are in very good condition. Some lost the fluid in their hydraulic system when they were turned over to be stacked up in the container, but that is very easy to take care of. In general all items arrived very well because the container was very well secured. In addition, the transportation within Chile worked perfectly. As soon as the container was unloaded in the port of San Antonio, it was released immediately and traveled non-stop to Pitrufquén.

Some members of our hospital's professional staff were very impressed by the quantity of things in the shipment and by their good condition. They have already started to assign them to departments, even before Customs releases them. All of this of course is a good sign, since some people here at the hospital were beginning to doubt the success of our project.

At this moment we are planning what will be the ceremonies where we will present the different items in the shipment. Most of it will remain in the hospital in Pitrufquén.

I do not know when you will be in Chile but we would like very much to have you as our guests at that time since we know how important your efforts have been in completing this project. We want to leave a permanent testimony of the generosity of Valdosta with our hospital by placing a plaque to remember this project as we had discussed previously. My concern is whether we should place it in appreciation of the Rotary Club of Valdosta or the city of Valdosta or the hospitals that donated the equipment. Help me with this and please provide me with the names and addresses, including e-mail, of each of the donors because I want to send a personal letter of appreciation.

My dear friends and relatives, once again accept my sincere thanks for all you have done, first, for the community in Pitrufquén and second, for the employees of the Pitrufquén Hospital who will see their work eased and enhanced to the benefit of their patients. As director of this hospital that soon will rise in standing thanks to this type of enhancement, I want to express sincere and heartfelt appreciation for the welcome you extended to me when we visited your beautiful city of Valdosta. We will never forget the warm hospitality you showed to us in each of the activities we were part of and especially in your home, of which I have the best memories. All of this leaves me eternally grateful.

Let me know when you will be coming to Chile.

[Affectionately] yours,

Jaime Moreno D.

# DISTRICT NEWS

## *Savannah South Rotary Club Becomes 100 Percent Paul Harris Fellow*

The Rotary Club of Savannah South inducted 30 new Paul Harris fellows during the visit of Rotary International President Elect Glenn Estess, Sr., on April 27, 2004.

With the induction of these new Paul Harris fellows, Savannah South becomes a 100 percent Paul Harris Fellowship club. There is only one other such club in Georgia (Vidalia) and only 476 out of more than 31,000 Rotary Clubs world wide. Savannah South has now named 161 Paul Harris fellows since the club was chartered in 1981.



*DG Leon Benefield presents a 100 percent PHF banner to Savannah South Club President Shari Miltidas.*

## *Efforts Promote Social Stability*

*The following is an excerpt of the article posted on the Rotary International Web site ([www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org)) on April 1. The article can be read in its entirety at [http://www.rotary.org/newsroom/print/eve02\\_040401.html](http://www.rotary.org/newsroom/print/eve02_040401.html)*

“Whenever we talk about the issue of literacy, we think first of the millions of people – mostly in developing countries – who cannot read, write or perform basic mathematical calculations. Without these basic skills, people are stranded in a desolate wasteland – unable to free themselves from the permanent darkness of poverty and despair,” said RI President Jonathan Majiyagbe. “There are millions more in need of our help – those who struggle in the twilight of functional illiteracy. In developed countries where the ability to earn a living almost always depends on the ability to process information, those who are functionally illiterate are at virtually the same disadvantage as those who cannot read or write at all.”

To illustrate why it was important for U.S. Rotarians to devote time and money to literacy projects, RI Director David Roper used sobering statistics from the National Institute for Literacy, a government agency administered by the secretaries of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services. Among the facts he quoted: adults who can’t read are hospitalized at twice the rate as those with better reading skills; 43 percent of those at the lowest literacy level live in poverty; 60 percent of prison inmates are illiterate; and 85 percent of youthful offenders have trouble reading.

“Adults who can’t read can’t help their children to read, and the cycle of illiteracy and poverty is passed on. The ramifications of illiteracy are endless,” said Roper. “Helping people to achieve literacy and numeracy skills and become self-sufficient is the most critical tool available for fighting poverty. Regardless of the community, there are many opportunities for Rotarians to promote literacy.”

## **District Conference Highlights Valdosta, GA April 23-25**



*This year’s GRSP students gathered for a group photo after speaking to conference attendees Saturday morning. Each said they were forever indebted to District 6920 Rotarians for the opportunity to study abroad.*



*Five-time Grammy Award winner B.J. Thomas provides Friday night’s entertainment.*



*Secretary of State Cathy Cox speaks with a guest following her presentation at Friday’s kickoff luncheon.*



## Speech Competition

DG Leon Benefield congratulates this year's high school speech contest winners. Stephen Byxbe, sponsored by the Dublin club, placed third; Johanna Mathis, sponsored by the Sandersville club, placed second, and Hannah Dasher, sponsored by the Effingham Sunrise club, placed first. During her speech, Hannah said, "The best helping hand is at the end of your own arm. There is no better exercise for your heart than reaching down and lifting someone else up." The students competed for the annual awards at the district conference April 24 in Valdosta.

## Group Study Exchange Fosters Friendships



The Chilean and American team members gather for a group photo (top). Clockwise, the American team gathers for a group photo in Portugal; Claudio and Carola dance the Chilean hen and rooster mating dance; the Chilean team dines at Cracker Barrel in Tifton; the American team in Portugal.

