

News from the Greggs

Serving with Mercy Ships at the International Operations Centre, Texas



Howdy Y'all

Greetings from a hot and sticky East Texas. It is reaching 40°C here most days at the moment and we are very grateful that the Mercy Ships base has a pool and that we have air-conditioning in our house and car. Vicki, who normally adores warm weather is feeling it a bit more than usual - for those that don't know - she is pregnant! We are expecting the baby (named 'Greggy' by Rebekah) in the first week of December.

Rebekah and Stefan continue to thrive here. They have had a great summer with family visiting and lots of fun with friends. Stefan went to a working ranch for a day camp and had the chance to go fishing, canoeing, horse-riding and help with the animals which he loved. At the ending ceremony he was given the award of 'Top Hand' and is so proud of his hat and certificate. He must be a cowboy in the making!

The Africa Mercy is at full capacity now in Liberia and everyone is working flat out to provide the much-needed aid. There is however, a shortage of nurses for the first time in a very long time - so if you know of anyone with surgical experience who would like to volunteer for a few months or more, please tell them to check out the website for details. Vicki had been

thinking about going short-term to help out with the admission of new patients but with the pregnancy, it is probably wiser to stay at home. Chris will have to make a visit to the ship sometime in the next 6 months. One of his current concerns is losing the ship IT manager which is a hard position to fill as it requires a hard worker who is highly skilled, flexible and resourceful. Again, please let us know if you know anyone who might like to apply!

Things at the Mercy Ships base here are going well although funding is very much down, probably due to the current state of the world economy. There are plans afoot to design a new ship with double the hospital bed-space of the Africa Mercy but as you can imagine, this is very much a future vision rather than a present reality!

The price of flights has prevented us from making a visit home in the past year and a half but we are pleased to say that we have now booked to come to England and Guernsey in January when it is more reasonable (who would want to visit England in mid-winter?!) We hope to see some of you then...

Keep in touch!

With love from

Vicki, Chris, Stefan and Rebekah and 'Greggy'

Africa Mercy On Location in War-torn Liberia

Liberia is a war-wrecked nation living somewhere between hope and horror. The civil war left 200,000 dead and 1 million more lost their homes. The war destroyed families, businesses and all of the country's industry along with the water supply, telephone network, road infrastructure and electrical power grid. The fighting ended 5 years ago but the catastrophe lingers on. The poverty is overwhelming and with only 40 doctors in the whole country (25 years ago there were 450) the health needs are extreme. The life expectancy is just 41 years and the infant mortality rate is the highest in the world. During the third visit of Mercy Ships to Liberia the doctors and



nurses have been returning sight to the blind, restoring the faces of the disfigured, health and dignity to women rendered incontinent from childbirth and mobility to the lame. Agricultural programs help to improve food cultivation. In a place where unemployment is a staggering 85% a vegetable garden is a matter of life and death. Other teams construct and restore wells, training locals in the process, to reduce deaths from diarrhoeal diseases caused by drinking impure water.

The impact that the ship is having seems limited to the crew who see such devastating need everywhere they go. But for the thousands whose wounds have been healed or who now have clean water to drink a real difference has been made.

We would love to hear from you!

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Information Services

It's not until you see behind the scene do you realise how much it takes to keep an organisation such as Mercy Ships running. Over the last few months Chris and his team have spent considerable effort working to replace two of the main computer systems which help support the organisation - the system which tracks all the Mercy Ships staff and volunteers throughout the organisation, and the system which tracks communication with and donations from all the Mercy Ships supporters and donors. These have been complex projects lasting many months. The staff system went successfully operational on 1 August and the supporter system is due to be ready at the beginning of October.

This year we have lost a number of experienced staff from the team, all of whom have served for many years - a total 20 years between them! At a time when there extra pressures of large projects this certainly adds to the challenge. We have been able to a couple of great new people to the team this year but are still desperately in need of at least two more skilled IT staff.

In the midst of all this, Chris is enjoying the challenge of the role. There are plenty opportunities to be stretched and to grow in experience, but above all, Chris continues to find satisfaction in knowing that all his efforts and those of his team, contribute behind the scenes to help make a difference in the lives of the people Mercy Ships serves in West Africa.

Blessing

Blessing was an 8 year old who liked to play in her garden which had a drainage ditch full of sewage crossing it. One day she fell and cut her knee and an infection made it painful to walk. Just as it began to heal, another infection developed while her immunity was compromised. A gangrenous disease called 'Noma' ate way her lips leaving her horribly disfigured. Noma affects more than 100,000 African children a year and kills many as it destroys their faces and ability to eat. The most recent cases of Noma in the West were in the malnourished of the Prison of War camps of the 2nd world war. A simple Penicillin can cure it.

Blessing will be on board the Africa Mercy for a few months and will have 4 operations to reconstruct her face. Her case is more severe than most. A cleft lip can be repaired in a single operation and our doctors can remove cataracts to restore sight on 14 patients a day!

It's incredible to be able to bring a fully equipped Western standard hospital to a nation like Liberia and to able to bring hope and healing to so many. Thank you for supporting our work so that we at the International Operations Centre can enable the ship in Africa to achieve all that it does!

News from the Pregnancy Centre

Vicki spends every Tuesday morning working as a counsellor at the Pregnancy Resource Centre. Most of our clients are young girls with unplanned pregnancies looking for help. It is very different here. Healthcare is not free and a normal pregnancy and delivery in hospital costs between \$7000-\$10000, so we provide tests and ultrasounds, practical help with maternity and baby equipment, and advice about benefits, as well as counselling. We are a part of a larger organisation with a maternity home and adoption agency too. Some of the stories we hear are heartbreaking.

We recently had a girl of 15 who had been raped and who was devastated to discover she had a positive test. Then we had a woman who has been trying for a baby for years and consistently comes up negative. Sometimes it is so hard to understand why things happen the way they do but we have just to do our best to listen, comfort and help in any way that we can.

One other very unusual case was a lady who was **55**. She thought she was menopausal but 'felt' pregnant. She had 4 children the youngest of whom was 28 and yes, she was pregnant! Another surprise was a lady who had a 7 month baby and became pregnant by 'accident'. When we did an ultrasound we found she was carrying triplets. I must say, I am so grateful that we only have one on the way and an uncomplicated social situation!



Finances

Thank you to all who support us financially - we couldn't work for Mercy Ships without you. For those who don't know, we are supported by individual donations from family, friends, churches and a small stipend from Mercy Ships in Texas. This year has been quite tight for us with Rebekah's tonsillectomy and flights home, and with pregnancy and the new baby coming up we have some increasing expenses for 2009 also. If you know of anyone who might consider supporting our work with Mercy Ships please pass on our website address or email so they can find out more. Or if you have any ideas about how we can fundraise - let us know!