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giving-back > Medical Care and Smiles in Los Barriles

East Cape Community Urgent Care Clinic meets medical and dental needs

By Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr.

Twelve years ago Charlene Wenger, a retired U.S. Army Nurse Practitioner, was having her home in Los Barriles painted. Her thirty- four year old painter suddenly had a stroke and died. The young man was hypertensive but had not been diagnosed or treated. "All the doctor had was a stethoscope and the young man was declared dead before CPR could even be initiated. That is how it was then, and I am trying to change that," Wenger explains.



As an initial step toward changing things, Wenger began to bring supplies from the United States for the small medical clinics in the area. In 2000, she volunteered as a nurse practitioner, and two years later she formed the East Cape Community Urgent Care Clinic, A.C., (ECCUCC) a Mexican non-profit organization. With the non-profit established, Wenger began contacting hospitals in the area about opening a satellite clinic in Los Barriles. She felt the community needed a facility that included a full-time physician, a laboratory, and a pharmacy. After interviewing five hospitals, only Amerimed in Cabo San Lucas met her criteria. Amerimed made the commitment, brought in equipment to combine with the equipment Wenger had collected, hired a doctor and rented a building. Wenger facilitated an ambulance donation from the United States, and

Photo courtesy of Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr.

The clinic staff. From left to right: Char Wenger; Adela Lucero (reception); Luis Villaviciencia, RN, Marcial Cevallos, MD; Jorge Peraza Luzarraga, chemist; not shown - Rosario Hiraegos, housekeeping.

the clinic's doors opened to the public.

Today, Amerimed allows Wenger to operate her non- profit organization out of its facility, with no fee or rent. When members of the community can't afford to pay for their care, fees are paid by ECCUCC. The non-profit also provides medical supplies, crutches, hospital beds and walkers to those who can't afford them. Providing prescription medication is another issue Wenger and her team are addressing. "People run out of their medication all the time because they can't afford it, and then they have problems," she says.

The ECCUCC, has also established a dental clinic in Los Barriles to meet the need for a full-time dentist in the community. By charging adults, they raise enough money to provide free dental services to Mexican children. Among their successes is the story of a five year old child whose teeth were black and worn down to the nubs. At school, the children teased and called him "vampire kid" until ECCUCC stepped in and gave him a full mouth restoration. Today, teachers report that the child's grades have excelled, his personality has blossomed, and his behavior has improved, all by having a beautiful smile. The clinic hopes to see every child in the community on a regular basis for preventive care, routine cleaning and restorative care as needed.

ECCUCC's goals for the future include building a small non-profit community hospital on land that has already been donated. The full-service facility, affiliated with Amerimed will focus on prevention instead of crisis intervention. Plans also include basing a Red Cross ambulance adjacent to the hospital with a paramedic on call 24/7.BP

For more information about East Cape Community Urgent Care Clinic, A.C., contact Charlene Wenger at (624) 141-0797, or email her at retyer@aol.com.

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