

## Medical missions needed in Haiti



Huguette Duteau Salahuddin, shown at home in Palmetto, is a dentist who makes annual trips to Haiti to provide dental work through Partners With Haiti. CORRESPONDENT PHOTO / J. NIELSEN

By J. NIELSEN Correspondent

Published: Sunday, April 4, 2010 at 1:00 a.m.  
Last Modified: Saturday, April 3, 2010 at 7:06 p.m.

At a dinner party about four years ago, Dr. Huguette Duteau Salahuddin struck up a conversation with someone about Haiti and the need for medical personnel. In hindsight, she said, "I always wanted to do some sort of medical mission. I went to Haiti; they needed a dentist. I went, and it was a mind-blowing experience. The poverty and the sheer need: They need everything there." Once a year, she returns to her birthplace with four nurses, three physicians and several support personnel from St. Paul's Church in St. Petersburg on a Partners with Haiti medical mission. Duteau went there in March to offer a full week of care to the Haitian people. For the dentist, this year was no different, but for Haiti, it was. The country is still recovering from the devastating January earthquake. "It's still very chaotic," Duteau said.

The group makes a full day's journey to their annual destination, Plen Mapou, a village in the mountains on the Island of La Gonave. The last two hours are spent traveling 13 miles on roads nearly impossible to traverse. "We deliver treatment, often for high blood pressure, stomach problems and broken bones that they have lived with for months," Duteau said. With St. Paul's referral program, one or two people are brought to the United States for major surgery, most notably people suffering with the birth deformity club foot. "She being Haitian, it brought a lot of emotion and concern and seeing the lack of dental care they had, she became very attached to them," said Lou Pekrul, another Partners with Haiti volunteer.



Dr. Huguette Duteau Salahuddin works on a young patient, who lies in a lounge chair, in a clinic in Haiti. COURTESY PHOTO



Haitian children wait outside the temporary clinic to see a doctor. COURTESY PHOTO

Duteau, 53, was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Her father, an official with UNESCO, took his family all over the world. After Haiti, the family lived in the Belgian Congo and then France. Eventually, her family moved to New York City, where she graduated from Mount Saint Ursuline High School in the Bronx. A graduate of Howard University, Duteau has lived in Palmetto for 18 years, raising her children on her own after her husband died 14 years ago. "I was so touched how the world reached out to Haiti," she said. "Everybody's heart went out and you go there and don't see it. You don't see it happening. You expect to see bulldozers moving rubble, a clean-up crew. I expected to see a lot more." With supplies donated by Peterson Dental, everything -- including inflatable mattresses on which to sleep -- is brought from the United States. Her work is vital, said Dr. Mark Morris with Partners with Haiti. "People are in misery with bad teeth," he said. "She was born in Haiti. She has a special connection with the folks there. She's like the rest of us; she falls in love with the Haitian people."

Duteau said she almost did not go on this year's mission because the dental chairs had been loaned out. Someone in the group suggested she try a lounge chair, and that is what she did. "I saw 83 patients that week and extracted 261 teeth," she said. "There's no electricity. That's about all I can do. It's pretty primitive, but it works. You can't see everybody. It's never enough." With \$1,000 raised by the Children's Academy of Southwest Florida in Bradenton from selling hot dogs and hamburgers at weekend events, Duteau was asked to distribute the money to a deserving group in Haiti. She serves on the academy's board of directors, and the request proved to be a dilemma for her. She asked, "How can we make sure that the money trickles down to those who need it? I don't know." With guidance from missionaries in the country, Duteau split the money among three groups serving children; one was an orphanage in Port-au-Prince. "You wonder what they do when you are not there," she said. She said the Haitians are very friendly and come in their Sunday dress to meet the medical workers. "They want to honor us," Duteau said. "One year, someone had walked 10 hours to come to the clinic." The goal of the Partners with Haiti group is to open a clinic year-round. They sponsored two nurses who graduated last year, which was good timing because the earthquake caused the entire school system to shut down. The nurses will serve patients on a regular basis rather than once yearly. "We're very excited about that, delivering health care to that area," Duteau said.

With guidance from missionaries in the country, Duteau split the money among three groups serving children; one was an orphanage in Port-au-Prince. "You wonder what they do when you are not there," she said. She said the Haitians are very friendly and come in their Sunday dress to meet the medical workers. "They want to honor us," Duteau said. "One year, someone had walked 10 hours to come to the clinic." The goal of the Partners with Haiti group is to open a clinic year-round. They sponsored two nurses who graduated last year, which was good timing because the earthquake caused the entire school system to shut down. The nurses will serve patients on a regular basis rather than once yearly. "We're very excited about that, delivering health care to that area," Duteau said.