



People & Places

Local doctors look to give back to those in need

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A brother-sister duo of doctors in Thomson work far outside the walls of their office to help families and children in need in the Dominican Republic.

Christopher and Allison Menke had gone on several mission trips before, and Christopher Menke said they saw a need for medical care in underprivileged nations. They decided to begin Surgeons of Service in 2015.

"We are both surgeons, and we wanted to provide service to others," Christopher Menke said. "Our goal is to keep it open where anyone can help and to get other specialties involved."

The focus for the nonprofit organization is currently in a small, remote town called Las Terrenas in the Dominican Republic. Menke said the mission crew takes a three-hour direct flight from Atlanta to Santa Domingo, DR, then travel by car for two more hours before arriving in the town.

"We go for about a week and set up a clinic at a local hospital or facility," Christopher Menke said. "We work with people there and nurses who go ahead of us and let people know we are coming. When we get there, there are 100 people just waiting for us."

The clinic provides patients with foot and ankle medical care that they wouldn't otherwise receive, and the doctors provide basic medical services such as dispensing a pair of shoes or shoe inserts, braces, offering ibuprofen, cortisone injections and wound care to more advanced surgical services.

"We live in a bubble here in the states," Christopher Menke said.

"When you're exposed to what people in third world settings go through, you want to try to give back to people who don't have access to quality healthcare."

One success story from the Dominican Republic is a young boy named Steven.

"We prevented two unnecessary surgeries on a two-year-old boy in a third world country," Christopher Menke said. "When we first saw him in the clinic in 2014, he had very bowed legs. He was scheduled for two surgeries to fix the problem, but I thought it would be better to fix them with braces."

When Steven came to the clinic, Menke took a plaster mold of the boy's foot and leg and advised the boys parents to postpone the surgery. When the nonprofit visited again six months later, they fitted Steven with a custom brace made in the United States.

Christopher Menke said the organization, through the help of the Samana Smiles Foundation, was then able to find a podiatrist in Santo Domingo who fit Steven with above the knee braces. The doctors followed up with Steven each year they traveled back to the DR and his legs have gone back to normal.

"Thank you for everyone who donated their time and efforts to make this possible as this will impact Steven for the rest of his life!" Christopher Menke said. "These types of stories keep us going. It's very rewarding to see the gratitude on people's faces because they wouldn't get the care we provide otherwise."

In addition to providing medical care, the nonprofit also collects new or gently used shoes in the areas around their two offices, Greensboro and

Thomson, as well as from patients to take to the DR and disperse in the local area to children in need.

"We were running in a 5k charity race in the DR when I noticed I was running in Nike tennis shoes, but a lot of the children were either running barefoot or in sandals," Christopher Menke said. "I thought we could prevent a lot of their foot problems by providing shoes. We also noticed that there were children locally who struggle with getting new shoes which got the local idea going."

Christopher Menke said he got the idea started by giving away toys and shoes that his children had grown out of and then began taking donations from others. According to the Surgeons of Service website, Da Vinci Foot & Ankle locations in 2016-2017 have already collected over 1,000 pairs of adult and childrens shoes from generous patients.

Christopher Menke said the organization is looking to partner with schools in the area to get students involved as well as help local families who may be in need. In the area around Da Vinci Foot & Ankle's Greensboro location, the organization has partnered with Gatewood School and Lake Oconee Academy to raise money for the organization as well as collect shoes.

Shoe donations can also be made throughout the year at both Da Vinci Foot & Ankle locations. The Thomson location is located at 1043 Washington Road.

For information about Surgeons of Service and how you can help, you can either call the Da Vinci Foot & Ankle office in Thomson at (706)597-0102 or visit surgeonsofservice.org.



Photo courtesy of Surgeons of Service

The Surgeons of Service team is shown with children they helped at the clinic in Las Terrenas, Dominican Republic.



Photo courtesy of Surgeons of Service

Dr. Allison Menke is shown putting shoes on a young girl in the Dominican Republic.



Photo courtesy of Surgeons of Service

Above, Dr. Christopher Menke examines a boy's foot. Below, volunteers comb through shoes to be given out to those in need.



Photo courtesy of Surgeons of Service

Steven, one of the first patients Surgeons of Service helped, is shown above. When he was two years old, he had severely bowed legs, and with braces provided by the nonprofit his legs straightened without surgery.