

The real call of the South Pacific

Fiji, Vanuatu, Tahiti, Palau, Tonga, Samoa ... just hearing the names of these islands conjures up travel brochure images of cool turquoise seas and warm tropical sunsets. As real and appealing as those images may be, there is another calling in the South Pacific that few hear or know about. It's an urgent call for help.

Having sailed in the South Pacific, Richard and Stephanie Hackett, of the Rotary Club of Fern Ridge, US, witnessed both the incredible beauty and extreme hardship faced by those living on the remote islands. Seeing the need, they began reaching out to the island nations to learn more about the initiatives they had for their remote island citizens.

"Although the island nations were striving to build modern infrastructure on their larger, more populated primary islands, there was no service delivery mechanism in place or funds available to try and connect their hundreds of remote islands to even the most basic services," Richard said.

Richard and Stephanie understood that the need was urgent and knew that with the right relationships in



ABOVE: Sea Mercy vessel anchored inside the protected lagoon in Tuvuca, Fiji. (Photo: Sea Mercy)
RIGHT: Toothbrushes and lessons provided during a dental rotation. (Photo: Sea Mercy)

place, an organisation could stand in the gap to meet those remote island needs.

In 2012, they launched a non-profit organisation called Sea Mercy, a fleet of "free" floating healthcare clinics staffed by international-based healthcare volunteers who were willing to answer the call for help. Since 2013 they have visited over 150 remote islands, evaluated and treated over 11,500 medical patients, tested and provided over 4500 reading glasses, and treated over 1500 dental patients.

In 2014, following Cyclone Ian in Tonga, and in 2015, following Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, Sea Mercy sent eight vessels to deliver aid and medical care to the devastated remote islands there. In October 2015, they launched their First Response Fleet program to better serve those in need on the remote islands following a natural disaster.

In April 2016, they plan to send out their Global Mercy Armada to the remote Lau Group in Fiji. It is a program designed to train and assist

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the remote islands not only to be self-sustaining and survive, but to thrive economically.

With nine more island nations on their target list for these programs, they are looking for Rotarians who have the same heart for the people in the South Pacific and are willing to help. Whether it is to join a medical mission rotation, assist with disaster response needs, or offer your abilities for the Global Mercy Armada, contact Richard via email info@seamercy.org.