

VOSH / INTERNATIONAL  
VOLUNTEER OPTOMETRIC SERVICES TO HUMANITY

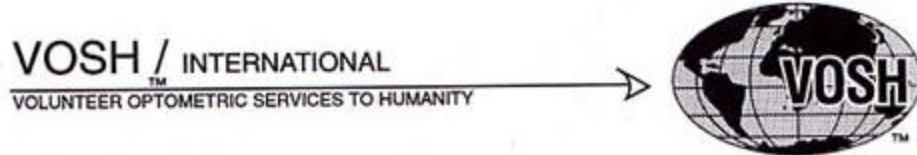


[www.VOSH.org](http://www.VOSH.org)

# **VOSH HISTORY**

FUNDED IN PART BY AN EDUCATIONAL GRANT FROM

**VISTAKON<sup>®</sup>,  
DIVISION OF JOHNSON & JOHNSON  
VISION CARE, INC.**



## **VOSH DEFINED**

VOSH (Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity) is an organization dedicated to providing vision care worldwide to persons who can't afford or obtain such care. Members include optometrists, ophthalmologists, opticians, medical personnel and trained laypersons. Volunteers have no political or religious agenda but they often work with service organizations, religious groups and/or governmental agencies.

## **HOW VOSH GOT UNDERWAY**

Dr. Franklin Harms, an optometrist in Hillsboro, Kansas, started VOSH in the early 1970's. Dr. Harms was a deeply religious man. As he neared his fiftieth birthday, he felt compelled to do something for his fellow man. When he learned about an upcoming eye care mission to Haiti to be led by Reynold Swanson, OD, of Florida, Dr. Harms signed on. Touched by his experiences, Dr. Harms continued to serve through missions in Haiti for the next several years.

Sensing the significant need for this service to humanity, Dr. Harms began writing letters in his state optometric journal promoting the concept of providing free eye care to the less fortunate. At the 1971 Kansas State Optometric Convention, questionnaires were handed out to members, seeking their input and an indication of interest. Thirty-three optometrists returned forms stating they would be willing to volunteer their services. Eight of the prospective volunteers were also pilots and volunteered their flying talents as well.

In early 1972, the Kansas Optometric Association appointed a steering committee of nine optometrists. Dr. Harms was named chairman. On March 21, 1972, the team got together and started planning their first endeavor. They formalized their fledgling organization with the official title of VOSH.

## **FIRST VOSH MISSION**

The first VOSH-Kansas project was a "fly-in" mission to Montemorelos, Mexico in the fall of 1972. The VOSH steering committee volunteered to serve on this initial endeavor "in order to get some first-hand experience and inspiration for more effective future planning." Two of the volunteers were pilots; one an optometrist, one an ophthalmologist and they flew the team to the site in their private planes. (Read details of their experience in the "Memorable Moments" section.) Kansas Lions Sight Foundation, Kiwanis, and Rotary Clubs were instrumental in obtaining barrels of glasses to be used on this first trip.

## **VOSH-Kansas GROWS TO VOSH/Interstate**

Just two years later, in February 1974, a nationwide VOSH workshop was held in Wichita, Kansas. Eighteen states were represented at this landmark VOSH event. Two strong state chapters developed from the meeting, VOSH-Indiana and VOSH-Iowa. A little over a year later, in September 1975, a nationwide VOSH symposium took place in Kansas City, Missouri, and VOSH was officially organized on a national level as VOSH/Interstate.

Dr. Harms continued to work tirelessly to advance VOSH/Interstate, both administratively and in the field. It is not surprising that just three years later, in 1978, thirty-nine states boasted active Chapters. Whenever he ran into another optometrist Dr. Harms would insist, "Your optometric career is not complete until you have participated in a VOSH eye care mission."

Dr. Harm's death that same year was a big loss to VOSH but the pioneer eye care humanitarian left behind an invaluable legacy, a strong organization dedicated to continuing his VOSH vision.

### **VOSH/Interstate BECOMES VOSH/INTERNATIONAL**

In its early days, VOSH had strong ties to the American Optometric Association (AOA). In 1979 the two organizations collaborated in developing by-laws for the new VOSH group. All agreed that VOSH should be managed by many individuals rather than relying upon one individual. With the resulting re-organization, VOSH/Interstate was re-named VOSH/INTERNATIONAL.

### **ACHIEVEMENTS OVER THE YEARS**

Over the 30+ years VOSH has been in existence, it has served more than a million individuals. As of 2003, there were 32 active Chapters with over 1800 members; two Chapters actually serve multi-state areas. SVOSH (Student VOSH) Chapters are active in the 17 schools of Optometry, representing over 400 members.

While VOSH/INTERNATIONAL has always served internationally, until recently most of its Chapters were based within the USA. A Canadian VOSH team, Third World Eye Care Society (TWECS) established an active Chapter in 1996 and VOSH-Honduras was established two years later in 1998. In 2002, two new VOSH Chapters got underway-in India and Tanzania. Inquiries regarding establishment of Chapters have been coming in from other countries. Indeed, VOSH continues to grow in its global role and now more accurately reflects its role as an international organization.

Parallel to our growth internationally and domestically is another interesting development—the increasing interest of other professionals and lay people in serving VOSH.

### **BUDGETARY CONCERNS, CHANGES**

VOSH/INTERNATIONAL's annual budget never exceeded a few thousand dollars until 2001, when Vistakon, a division of Johnson and Johnson, graciously awarded VOSH/INTERNATIONAL a one-year educational grant of \$20,000 to be used in support of the VOSH/INTERNATIONAL website, teaching others about VOSH, and promoting the cause of VOSH/INTERNATIONAL. In 2002, Dr. Stanley Yamane, Vice President of Professional Affairs of Vistakon, announced a second grant of \$20,000 to be used to further the work of VOSH/INTERNATIONAL. The importance of these two donations cannot be overstated. The money has provided VOSH/INTERNATIONAL a stable financial base on which to move the organization forward.

The VOSH Board is now working on developing other corporate grants and planned-giving programs from within its own membership.

### **VOSH/INTERNATIONAL website: [www.VOSH.org](http://www.VOSH.org)**

Perhaps the most important advance in the recent history of VOSH was the establishment of the VOSH website, [www.VOSH.org](http://www.VOSH.org) in 1999. During the first several months as the number of "hits" on the website were tracked, it was astonishing to find they numbered over 2,000 a month.

This high level of interest has continued to increase as the website expands. For example, this relatively inexpensive communication tool has enabled VOSH to keep in contact with its membership more readily and to serve as a clearinghouse for planned eye care clinics around the globe. Equally as important, it has enabled individuals, health care workers and other groups who assist needy people around the world to become aware of our organization--allowing them to contact VOSH for eye care. In short, it has enabled VOSH to assume our role as a truly international organization.

The VOSH website, [www.VOSH.org](http://www.VOSH.org), provides ready access to the comprehensive list of missions and its leadership, a forum for discussing related eye care topics and a message center where anyone in the world can voice an eye care concern or need. The site also includes forms for mission registration, for joining VOSH, and links to individual Chapters and other related organizations that have their own websites.

## **WRITTEN PUBLICATIONS**

VOSH/INTERNATIONAL publishes a ten-page newsletter in the fall, including a centerfold section listing upcoming eye care missions for the entire upcoming year. A second, smaller newsletter published in the spring primarily announces the upcoming annual meeting. The [www.VOSH.org](http://www.VOSH.org) website makes the newsletter available electronically as well. The printed newsletters are distributed to state Chapters and new members. In addition, the newsletter is an important tool when making contact at state, national and international meetings related to eye care.

VOSH/INTERNATIONAL has developed a booklet to assist chapters and mission directors entitled, "*Information for VOSH Chapters and Mission Directors*".

## **ANNUAL MEETING TIME**

Somehow, over time, cooperation between VOSH and the AOA drifted. In the past few years, VOSH/INTERNATIONAL has re-established a strong relationship with the AOA. Traditionally, VOSH Annual Meetings were held in the late fall, in a member state and hosted by that state's Chapter. In 2002, members voted to reschedule the Annual Meeting to be held the day before the opening of the AOA Annual Convention that traditionally takes place in June. The change was made with the desire to attract greater turnout of optometrists for the VOSH meeting as well as the opportunity to make contact with other optometrists, optometric leaders and student optometrists who will be attending the AOA educational meetings.

## **RECENT SIGNIFICANT RESOLUTIONS**

In 2002, V/I formed a "Single Membership" granting VOSH/INTERNATIONAL membership to all individuals who are members of local VOSH Chapters affiliated with VOSH/INTERNATIONAL. This action unifies our membership to truly reflect the strong number of VOSH volunteers we represent.

Also in 2002, V/I formed a committee to develop a "Fellowship of VOSH/INTERNATIONAL" as an award, with the title of Fellow of VOSH/INTERNATIONAL (FVI) in recognition of the individual's VOSH/INTERNATIONAL achievements, accomplishments and educational/professional qualifications.

## **SUPPORT WITHIN THE USA BORDERS**

VOSH is also expanding domestically as more missions are taking place within the confines of the USA.

VOSH-Northwest has been serving the needy since 1985, when the retiring Dr. Charles Benson of Omak, Washington, generously donated all of his professional equipment and instruments to VOSH. A clinic was established in space provided by the Union Mission of downtown Spokane and continues to operate to this day. A second clinic, the Lions-VOSH Lianne Eckman Memorial Vision Clinic was established at the Millonair Club in Seattle in 1991.

The first joint domestic mission between VOSH/INTERNATIONAL and state VOSH chapters was organized October 1997 in Detroit, Michigan. Chapters from around the country came together for a one-day mission to serve the homeless of Detroit. Approximately 200 patients were examined, 100 pair of eyeglasses were dispensed-- funded by a gift of \$3000 from AFVA (American Foundation for Vision Awareness, the auxiliary to the AOA).

Since 2001 VOSH/INTERNATIONAL has worked annually with Helen Keller Worldwide to provide eye care to the underprivileged in the Wise, Virginia area. Assisting in the project are co-coordinators ophthalmologist Lion Dr. Hauser Weiler and optometrist Dr. Vicki Weiss, along with the Lions of Virginia, RAM (Remote Area Medical) and a number of other optometrists, opticians, and lay persons.

In 2003 VOSH/INTERNATIONAL joined with AOA's VISION USA in providing care to those in need within the USA borders.

As an on-going mission, VOSH-Arizona examines patients in a local poverty area once a month. Special state legislation was passed to allow the use of re-cycled eyeglasses for this type of situation. The goal of VOSH-Arizona is to expand the service to other locales within the state.

Perhaps the most active VOSH chapter is VOSH-Illinois, which conducts 5 separate domestic missions annually. In some cases, patients are initially screened by a bilingual outreach program that provides health education and assistance to newly-arrived immigrants who don't have insurance. Special legislation was also passed in Illinois, allowing them to use re-cycled eyeglasses.

VOSH is very pleased to have continued affiliation and support from Rotary International and Lions International. These clubs serve as hosts in various countries, provide most of the recycled eyeglasses and provide some funding for individual state VOSH projects.

### **ASSUMING OUR INTERNATIONAL ROLE**

In 2002, VOSH/INTERNATIONAL, along with the AOA, signed on as a participant in Vision 20/20 — *The Right to Sight*, an unprecedented effort by the World Health Organization (WHO) to end preventable blindness around the world by the year 2020. A major portion of this preventable blindness is refractive error and cataracts. WHO has placed a priority on the use of ancillary personnel, various medical professionals, and other measures already used on VOSH missions.

In 2002, VOSH/INTERNATIONAL became a member of the World Council of Optometry (WCO), which emphasizes the improvement of the quality of optometric education in underdeveloped nations.

In 2003, VOSH/INTERNATIONAL was invited to Barcelona, Spain to participate in the international UNESCO meeting. The president of VOSH/INTERNATIONAL, Harry Zeltzer, O.D., presented to the delegates of the UNESCO convention information related to VOSH activities.

### **Past International Presidents**

<b>Harry Zeltzer, O.D.</b>	<b>VOSH-NECO</b>
<b>Jeffrey Marshall, O.D.</b>	<b>VOSH-Indiana</b>
<b>Phil Hottel, O.D.</b>	<b>VOSH-Iowa</b>
<b>Michel Listenberger, O.D.</b>	<b>VOSH-Michigan</b>
<b>*Phil Freitag, O.D.</b>	<b>VOSH-SouthDakota</b>
<b>Jim Hess, O.D.</b>	<b>VOSH-Minnesota</b>
<b>Wayne Vanderleest, O.D.</b>	<b>VOSH-Iowa</b>
<b>Charles Gray, O.D.</b>	<b>VOSH-Nebraska</b>
<b>Thomas C. Henley, O.D.</b>	<b>VOSH-Indiana</b>
<b>Stephen Rose, O.D.</b>	<b>VOSH-Iowa</b>
<b>Bud Falkenhain, O.D.</b>	<b>VOSH-Missouri</b>
<b>*Russell Dorland, O.D.</b>	<b>VOSH-Minnesota</b>
<b>*Franklin Harms, O.D.</b>	<b>VOSH-Kansas</b>

\* Deceased

### **SOME MEMORABLE VOSH MOMENTS**

### ***About that first VOSH mission***

Dr. Norm Abrahams, optometrist and one of the two Kansas volunteer pilots who served on the very first VOSH mission, noted that when the team arrived at the border in Redosa, Mexico, customs agents could not believe this group would take all those glasses into Mexico and not try to sell them for a profit. For this reason the team was forced to leave one person behind and he was replaced with an armed Mexican representative. Dr. Rich Morlong, another team member, recalled the guard having guns strapped all over himself.

When the plane neared the dirt landing strip at the edge of town, the volunteers realized the strip was covered with small Mexican burros. As the two pilots radioed back and forth, it was decided that Dr. Jim Enns, the ophthalmologist and second pilot, would buzz the strip to try to move the burros out of the way. Dr. Morlong later commented, "Those burros moved so fast they likely ended up somewhere in South America." Once Mexican officials were convinced the VOSH team was truly in the country to give vision to those in need, one of the pilots was allowed to go back and claim the "hostage."

### ***A determined lady***

An elderly Honduran woman walked 8 hours to the clinic, was diagnosed with cataracts, had the surgery that afternoon, slept on a hard bench in the school hallway that night and refused any pain medication. She was examined and fitted with glasses the next morning and then walked the eight-hour journey home wearing the biggest grin you ever might see.

### ***A baby sees for the first time***

A 14-month-old baby in Haiti was diagnosed as having had cataract surgery by just having the lens capsules lanced and the lens of the eyes was allowed to dissolve—leaving her blind. The Baptist missionary host happened to have a hobby as a lapidarist (grinding and polishing rocks). With his help, the dispensary staff was able to grind down adult cataract lenses to fit into a child's frame. When the glasses were placed on the child she looked at her hands and then looked into her mother's face and smiled, never having seen her mother clearly before.

### ***The boy who could not see***

A young Honduran boy was led into a VOSH clinic with his eyes closed. His friends said the sun bothered him. Upon examination, it was discovered he was extremely nearsighted, not able to see clearly beyond 5 or 6 inches. With the proper prescription, his eyes opened wide. Looking through lenses of his prescription he began to cry when he looked to the playground and saw, for the first time, trees and buildings and his friends playing. He said he was going back to school to learn to read as they had dismissed him many years ago because they thought he was dumb. Dale K. Cole, OD

A similar situation occurred in Columbia. A 21 year-old boy was led by the hand to a chair. Due to his poor vision he had led a very reclusive lifestyle. When he was fit with -19.00D glasses his reaction was complete and total astonishment. His first words were "Can I go to school now? Can I ride a bike?" Tears of gratitude were shed by the translator (and by the doctor). Ed Tuhy, OD

### ***A gift of sight and more***

In El Salvador, a disheveled man walked into the clinic with the aide of a cane. According to his history an explosion during combat caused dense corneal scarring of both eyes and a displaced crystalline lens. After examining him with the slit lamp we found an irregular shaped area within the cornea that had some clarity about two or three mm in diameter. Excitedly, we located an aphakic correction from the inventory. It increased his acuity from counting fingers at 3 feet to 20/40. Lo and behold another aphakic correction was found that allowed him to read newspaper print. Everyone in the clinic was so thrilled we collected \$200 and gave him numerous toys for his three children. Two years later the gentleman re-appeared without a cane and nicely dressed. We learned he was successfully selling lottery tickets on the street. The purpose of his second visit was to return \$200! Harry Zeltzer, OD

### ***More than an eye examination***

As we were planning to depart one of our missions in Honduras, a man came for an examination. He had walked for two days to reach the clinic, but we had already closed down, the van was loaded. Somehow I felt the man needed attention and I took out the necessary examining equipment and took care of his needs. I noted that he had no food with him and I felt that he needed a meal more than I did, so I offered him the plate of food that had been prepared for the volunteers. He was very thankful. - Norm Abrams, OD (member of 1<sup>st</sup> VOSH mission)

**Fact:** The largest VOSH mission ever was VOSH-Northeast's trip to Jinotepe, Nicaragua in January 2003 with 88 members volunteering their time and talents.

## **PERMANENT CLINIC SITES**

### **SAN JUAN DEL SUR, NICARAGUA**

VOSH-NECO established this permanent one-lane clinic within a local health clinic in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua in 2000. The town is situated on a small bay. Ideal for optometrists willing to combine service/Spanish language study/vacation. Volunteers can be accommodated most any week of year, subject to schedule of local health doctor who oversees multiple projects.

[JFEyecare@aol.com](mailto:JFEyecare@aol.com) or [eyeclam@aol.com](mailto:eyeclam@aol.com)

### **GRANADA, NICARAGUA**

Established in 2002 by VOSH-Louisiana, the clinic is situated in a room within Cristo Sana, a Catholic school for boys, in the colonial town of Granada, Nicaragua. Plans are to staff it six times annually, and to install a finishing lab. Optometric volunteers are wanted.

Project leader is Dr. Jim Sandefur, [Isao@bellsouth.net](mailto:Isao@bellsouth.net)

### **SAN PEDRO SULA, HONDURAS**

This is a full eye clinic that is housed in a two-story building with 2,200 square feet. It includes areas for examining, dispensing, prepping, surgery, post op, etc. Most recently, Ruth has added a clinic for general medicine and a pharmacy. Optometric volunteers are welcome.

For scheduling, info, contact *Fundacion para Servicios Medicos Voluntarios, Ruth Berkling*, [rberkling@sulanet.net](mailto:rberkling@sulanet.net)

### **EL PROGRESO, HONDURAS**

Lions and Rotarians are in the process of establishing a full eye care clinic in El Progreso, Honduras and welcome optometric volunteers. They anticipate having four lanes up and running in July 2003.

Project coordinator is Harold Weiler, [weiler@sylvaininfo.net](mailto:weiler@sylvaininfo.net)

### **CUERO Y SALUDO WILDLIFE REFUGE, HONDURAS**

33 km west of la Ceiba, Caribbean coast of Honduras

This is a small, two-room Primary Health Care Clinic, built by VOSH-Oregon in 1998, in conjunction with the Cuero y Saludo Floundation (FUCSA) and staffed 5 days per week by a local public health nurse from the Ministry of Health. Available equipment includes a chair, stand, phoropter and slit lamp. Electricity is wired to the building but only accessible if Dole Fruit Co. is operating the coconut plantation within the refuge and their gas generator is running.

FUCSA has a visitor's center with rough accommodations for volunteers. Bring your own food, supplies, and potable water. Consider it a camping trip. This wildlife refuge is home to a manatee, howler monkeys, incredible bird species, and the human village population, which was allowed to stay when it received national designation as a protected area in 1986.

Janet Leasher, OD, MPH, [janetleasher@hotmail.com](mailto:janetleasher@hotmail.com)

### **LA ESPERANZA, HONDURAS**

The clinic was established by VOSH-MI and the La Esperanza Lions Club. It has two lanes of equipment including slit lamp (one with a Goldman Tonometer), keratometer, projector with slides, lensometer, Humphrey Auto Refractor, Focometer, a Perkins tonometer, retinoscope, and

ophthalmoscope. The Lions operate the clinic on Saturdays and will assist with translators for VOSH missions. In the future there will be a Dental Clinic as well. Project coordinator is Bob Foote, OD, [boone@chartermi.net](mailto:boone@chartermi.net).

### **CATACAMAS, HONDURAS**

In 2003, VOSH-Kansas OD's established a clinic in conjunction with host organization Prednisan in the town of Catacamas. The clinic consists of an exam chair and stand, phoropter, slit lamp with Goldmann tonometer, keratometer, projector with slides, autoplots, lensometer, and miscellaneous equipment. The set up would be perfect for 1-2 OD's, working with equipment comparable to what we have in the states. The only equipment required of the OD would be their hand diagnostic equipment. The site is available any time of the year.

Contact Don Kuehn, OD @ Russell, Kansas; [dkuehn@eaglecom.net](mailto:dkuehn@eaglecom.net); 785-483-4508.

### **JEREMIE, HAITI**

Haitian Health Foundation has a multi-disciplinary permanent clinic with a separate, modern eye care facility. Optometrists can be accommodated any week of the year. Housing is provided.

Dr. Robert Pannone of CT 860-887-2060 [dr.pannone@snet.net](mailto:dr.pannone@snet.net)

### **APOPA, EL SALVADOR**

Dr. Ken Henderson of Bellingham, WA, a member of VOSH-Northwest is in the process of establishing a permanent clinic in Apopa, El Salvador. This will be in association with an existing community clinic just outside the capital city, San Salvador. Donated equipment includes an Zeiss/Humphrey auto-lensometer, slit lamp, keratometer, BIO, and fundus lenses. A supply of used glasses is available. Additional equipment is being sought to complete the lane. Anyone interested in donating or working in the clinic contact Ken Henderson at [hendersonkod@qwest.net](mailto:hendersonkod@qwest.net).

### **SANTA ANA, EL SALVADOR (ASAPROSAR)**

A well-equipped, multi-disciplined facility founded by Dr. Vicki Guzman. VOSH is encouraged to use these facilities. Patients receive follow-up care and cataract surgery. A computerized recycled eyeglass program is intact and an optical laboratory is onsite. Comfortable quarters, excellent cuisine and super hospitality make for an excellent working holiday.

Dr. Harry Zeltzer, [harryzeltzer@attbi.com](mailto:harryzeltzer@attbi.com)

### **JUTIAPA, GUATEMALA**

In 1997, VOSH-PA and SVOSH of the Pennsylvania College of Optometry formed the Vincent Pescatore Eye Clinic in the Peten jungle region of Guatemala, naming it in honor of the American missionary who invited them to build it. Before the clinic was up and running, Mr. Pescatore died tragically in a plane crash in 1996. Located in Jutiapa, Guatemala, this is a full eye care clinic that provides eye examinations, eye surgery, and prescriptive eyewear. Optometric volunteers are wanted.

Contact Dr. Doug Vilella, [doogie@erie.net](mailto:doogie@erie.net)

### **ENSENADA, MEXICO**

Optometrists and opticians wanted to work weekends/several weeks at the eye clinic/Eye Glasses Recycling Center, recently located in Ensenada.

Dennis Gunst, [dgunst@hotmail.com](mailto:dgunst@hotmail.com)

### **GUANAJUATO, MEXICO**

After a VOSH trip in 1998, the EyeCare Center in Guanajuato, Mexico was formed in conjunction with Indiana School of Optometry and the Department of Infants and Family, a Mexico state organization charged with supporting indigent people. This has become a 4<sup>th</sup> year clinic rotation with Dr. Doug Horner as faculty advisor/coordinator.

See the website at [www.opt.indiana.edu/clinics/mexico/hx.htm](http://www.opt.indiana.edu/clinics/mexico/hx.htm).