

VOSH-CT recently completed it's 9th mission to San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua. Patients came from throughout the entire southern Nicaragua region, making a round trip around to the surrounding towns and barrios. There were a total of 45 miles of optometry students from the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Iowa. The mission was led by Litchfield residents Dr. Matthew & Audrey Blondiver College in Boston. It was a very challenging mission, as our local sponsor's boxes of mission supplies were already in transit. Ultimately we only received a payment in cash of a large "tax and fee", and many of those boxes that were damaged. We were very upset and disappointed with all of this, as among the mission supplies were animals, clothing and baseball caps that had been collected and donated by Litchfield who have been very supportive of our mission over the years. We were very fortunate that most of the eyeglasses that we had sent down were not damaged. We experience not to ship down sunglasses which are given to each patient in pairs of sunglasses, so we were able to get them down there without too much trouble when they all arrived at the Managua airport and has yet to be recovered. The poverty in Nicaragua has become more extreme than ever, as Nicaragua is the poorest in the Western Hemisphere after Haiti. We had brought a lot of candy with us for the children. The children to be seen were very hungry and grateful for the little bit that we could give them. LaMonica's in Torrington, and that helped a great deal all around. The weather was terrible there, with 40-50 mph winds daily, blowing dirt and debris constantly burning trash piles along the roads. We were very grateful for the continued opportunity to be of service to the people of Nicaragua despite some growing anti-American sentiment fueled by the Ortega government. Previous missions have ceased coming to Nicaragua because of the difficulties created when President Ortega came to power. He has 2 more years of a 5 year term, but is not to step down at the end of his term as he is constitutionally required to do so. This was our 12th year of service to the San Juan del Sur area, the previous missions' members have been coming with us for more than 7 years now, and the mission is held year to year. We have now made arrangements through a local librarian in San Juan del Sur to shipper in Colorado, so we're hoping for next year's mission to have less trouble with supplies.