

# Health Care HEROES

## TOP WINNER Community Outreach

Twice a year, Dr. Michael Murphy travels to the Dominican Republic.

Murphy doesn't travel alone. He brings a team of medical residents, fellows and nurses with him — about half a dozen altogether — to the city of La Romana, where they spend a week at the Centro Medico-Central Romana Hospital.

An orthopedic surgeon whose specialty is the hand, wrist and upper extremities, Murphy said he gets tremendous satisfaction from the trips, on which he spends grueling 12-hour days in a clinic treating patients for free.

"This is why I became a doctor," he said. "I get far more out of it than [the patients] do."

Participants have included medical residents from Johns Hopkins and Georgetown University hospitals; fellows from Union Memorial Hospital's Curtis National Hand Center and nurses from Lutherville SurgiCenter. Local philanthropist Dorothy McIlvain Scott pays for the group's travel expenses. A hotel in La Romana hosts their stay. The team travels with the medical supplies they will need.

Murphy took over the missions a decade ago from Dr. Shaw Wilgus, one of Greater Chesapeake's founding members, who started the medical missions several years before that after getting to know the Menendez family of the Dominican Republic.

"People know we're coming, so they wait for us" to be treated, said Murphy, who learned to speak Spanish so he could converse with his patients.

Most of them have no running water, no toilets and no telephones. If Murphy wants to see a former patient, he

puts the word out and the person, invariably, shows up.

The hospital runs 20 operating rooms during each team visit. A general surgeon pre-screens patients, and generally eight to 10 patients are treated each day, or about 40 during the week's stay.

Injuries range from burns to nerve damage — often the result of cooking over open fires. Others may have been involved in machete fights.

"They don't have guns but they do have machetes," said Murphy, and the latter inflict wounds that are "pretty horrific."

About half of the patients are children between the ages of two months to adolescence, who often arrive at the hospital wearing their best clothes. They may have congenital problems like extra fingers or lack of a thumb. Other injuries may require reconstructive surgery. Some patients are seen repeatedly. One 12-year-old burn victim has received multiple tissue transplants to ensure she can more easily move her hands and arms.

"We are putting our skills to use," said Murphy. "It's good to see what we can accomplish."

— Barbara Pash

## Michael Murphy, M.D.

GREATER CHESAPEAKE HAND  
SPECIALISTS PA



RICH DENNISON