



*Jack Heck, D.D.S.*



The Kiwanis Club of Port Huron, Michigan is extremely proud to present Jack Heck, D.D.S. as a candidate for the Frank O. Staiger Award.

Jack has been a member of the Kiwanis Club of Port Huron since December, 1968. Jack first learned about Kiwanis as a Key Club Member at Denby High School in Detroit and continued as a Circle K Member at the University of Michigan.

When Jack moved to Port Huron to take over a dental practice, one of his first involvements in our community was to join our Kiwanis Club. He has served as a Board Member and has been Chairman of the International Relations Committee for many years. He participates in all of our club's fund-raising projects.

Dr. Heck is a member of the First Presbyterian Church in Port Huron. He has served the church as a Deacon and was Chairman of the Mission Committee for many years. Since January, 1983 Jack has made 11 mission trips to Haiti and one to Mexico in 1993. Jack made his first trip to Haiti in January of 1981 at the request of his First Presbyterian Pastor, Ron Naylor. That first trip was a life-changing experience which was only the beginning of many more years of missionary dentistry. On the return flight from his second trip in 1982, he met a man on the airplane who had just built a dental clinic on the island of LaGonave. Jack had heard tales of the primitive conditions on the remote island situated in Haiti's bay and vowed that he would work in that clinic the following year. It was that chance meeting on the airplane that introduced Jack to the West Indies Self Help (WISH) mission on LaGonave Island and its founder, Tony Wolf. With the exception of 2 years, Jack has worked in the island clinic two weeks every year since 1983. He has served on the WISH Board of Directors since 1985 and is currently serving his second 3 year term as President.

Each mission trip involves months of preparation and planning. Donations of supplies and medicines are gathered, sorted and packed. Jack always collects gifts for the Haitians - toys, clothing, hair bows, and of course TOOTHBRUSHES. Office schedules must be arranged for 2 weeks off (without pay!).

Work in Haiti is unlike any typical day in the dental office at home. Often, water supply is unreliable requiring a reserve bucket for washing hands and instruments. The patients he treats do not speak English, so he has learned enough "dental Creole" to communicate simple instructions to the patients. He relies on an interpreter for more detailed conversations. Since the clinic is mostly open-air, it is necessary to burn mosquito coils. Jack is challenged with dental cases unlike any he sees in his own office. Patients line up hours in advance hoping for a chance to be treated by the dentist, never knowing when another dentist may return. It is the tremendous need for treatment and the grateful patients that keep Jack returning year after year.

During his trips, Jack treats more than dental pain. He sees their personal pain and suffering related to poverty and illness. He makes every effort to know the Haitians and experience their culture. He takes time to toss a donated Frisbee with children or just hold their hand as he walks through the village. He visits them in their mud and stick homes in the evenings. Even in the dental clinic, he tries to find out personal information about the patients - how far they walked to get to the clinic, how many children they have, did they plant a garden...

Jack served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Thumb Dental Association and was its President in 1981-82. The American Dental Association presented him with its outstanding service award for services in a foreign country.

Jack does not forget the poverty and suffering when he returns to the U.S. He strives to improve awareness of this Third World Country and improve conditions with fund-raising and service through WISH, churches, Kiwanis and other service organizations. His slides and presentations are very effective in telling the story of poverty that prevails in Haiti and especially on the Island of LaGonave.

Jack's lovely wife, Mary Jo, is currently the Principal of the Harrison Elementary School in Port Huron, Michigan. His daughter Jennifer is a Biologist with the Department of Interior in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. His son Mike is a Junior at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His major is Criminal justice. Jack is the epitome of an involved Kiwanian and Jack's family is extremely proud of Jack's humanitarian accomplishments.