

Background & Accomplishments

Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity of Pennsylvania (VOSH/PA) is a non-governmental, non-sectarian, non-profit U.S.-based chapter of VOSH International. It was established in 1990 to make curative and preventive eye care available to the rural poor in developing countries. Based on our experiences in eight countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, and with insights gained by cooperation with other international eye care organizations, VOSH/PA has developed a model to provide medical, surgical, and refractive eye care for the poor in Latin America.

The VOSH/PA mission is to empower local eye care specialists in developing countries by building sustainable eye clinics, funding essential ophthalmic infrastructure, and establishing partnerships with like-minded organizations.

VOSH/PA's first eye care mission trip to Guatemala was in 1994, to the department of Alta Verapaz - to the towns of Senahú and Telemán. On a small field next to an elementary school near Telemán, we first met the American missionary, Vincent Pescatore. In his small, single-engine Cessna aircraft, he transported us to the northernmost department (state) of Guatemala known as El Petén, where he had established an orphanage known as Farm of the Child.

The first clinic building, pictured above and located in San Benito, Petén (near Flores), has now evolved into the "Pescatore Eye Association" with three clinics located in different departments (states) of Guatemala. The Pescatore Eye Association is named in honor of Vincent Pescatore, who first envisioned these eye clinics. (Pescatore, along with two American volunteers, died in a plane crash in Honduras in January, 1996. At the time, they were working to construct their new orphanage in Trujillo, Honduras.)

The goal of the Pescatore Eye Association is to work toward the "elimination of all avoidable blindness" in Guatemala by the year 2020. This is in accordance with the goals established by the World Health Organization's (WHO) VISION 2020: The Right to Sight initiative and the National Vision 2020 Committee of Guatemala.

The three eye clinics include:

Visualiza in Guatemala City, which was established by Drs. Mariano and Nicolas Yee, two brothers who are both ophthalmologists.

The Vincent Pescatore Eye Clinic, in the department of El Petén, that is staffed on a rotational basis by Dr. Mariano Yee, Dr. Nicolas Yee, Dr. Edwin Arias, and Dr. Antonio Hernández.

The Jutiapa Eye Clinic, located inside the St. John the Baptist Hospital in Jalpatagua in the department (state) of Jutiapa, established by Dr. Antonio Hernández.

The three clinics are staffed by 80 Guatemalans, including 6 ophthalmologists and 2 optometrists, treat in excess of 50,000 patients, and are self-supporting for operating expenses for adult care. VOSH/PA funds the treatment of all indigent children under the age of 14 years old. The clinics are funding the training of 4 employees to become optometrists.