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## NEWS RELEASE

### **ANCHORAGE RESIDENTS BRING HEALTHCARE, HOPE AND DIGNITY TO THOUSANDS OF IMPOVERISHED NICARAGUANS**

***Four Anchorage residents were part of a team of 63 International Medical Alliance volunteers from across the United States who provided free healthcare services to more than 8,446 impoverished Nicaraguans***

ANCHORAGE, Sept. 1, 2010 – Most people use their vacation time to visit family and friends, explore new places and simply relax.

But not Laura Sarcone. The certified Nurse-Midwife and Nurse Practitioner took time off from her jobs at the private office of Donna Chester, MD and the OB-GYN clinic at Southcentral Foundation in early August to volunteer on a 10-day medical humanitarian mission to Nicaragua, which was organized by Rancho Mirage, Calif.-based International Medical Alliance (IMA).

Three other Anchorage residents joined Sarcone on the medical mission, including Carisa Sampaga-Verdoia and Panna Jarussi, both nurses from Alaska Regional Hospital, as well as Panna's husband, Louie Jarussi, a former Peace Corps volunteer who works as a Spanish and history teacher for the Anchorage School District.

During their humanitarian mission in Nicaragua, Louie Jarussi volunteered his talents as a Spanish language translator, while Sarcone spent most of her time evaluating and treating OBGYN patients. Meanwhile, Sampaga-Verdoia and Panna Jarussi worked with IMA's team of volunteer surgeons, who literally changed the lives of the patients they treated.

Their patients included a six-year-old girl, Aysel Iraña Galeano, who couldn't walk because of a birth defect involving the tendons in her left foot, and 35-year-old Jose Fernando Toruño, who needed reconstructive surgery on his skull after suffering massive head injuries in a motorcycle accident. Nicaraguan doctors had cut a hole in his head to stop his intracranial bleeding, but an infection later forced them to remove part of his forehead, leaving a baseball size area of his frontal lobe without any protection other than a thin layer of skin.

Then there was 67-year-old Santos de Cruz Meza. Born with a cleft lip, her deformity worsened with age, twisting her nose while the top of her mouth produced a frightening jumble of rotting, unusable teeth.

But with the help of IMA's Anchorage-based volunteers, these and other patients received life-changing surgeries and other medical care that they either couldn't afford or that simply wasn't available in Nicaragua.

In fact, during their 10-day medical mission in early August, the 65 IMA volunteers provided medical services to 8,446 people, including 120 life-changing surgeries, 695 dental procedures, 949 pediatric and 1,465 internal medicine consultations involving everything from urinary tract infections to ear aches, stomach aches, joint pains, tropical skin rashes and allergy related ailments.

Thania S. Garcia, a representative from the Nicaraguan Consulate in Los Angeles who helped coordinate the mission, said her country is extremely grateful for the help and goodwill of the American volunteers, many of whom provided specialized medical care that is not available in Nicaragua, which is widely considered to be the second poorest country in the western hemisphere after Haiti. Most medical missions, she added, do not provide dental care or have volunteers who can fit patients with prosthetic limbs.

The Anchorage volunteers, for their part, said they felt fortunate simply to be in a position to participate in a medical humanitarian mission in Nicaragua.

"I like being part of something that makes the world a better place," said Sarcone, who has previously volunteered on medical missions in Sudan, Afghanistan, Malawi and Saipan.

Panna Jarussi, who also works as a school nurse for the Anchorage School District, said the trip changed her life. "It's been an eye-opening experience," she said, adding, "I think all nurses need a humbling, life-changing experience to put aside their ethnocentricities and do what's right for mankind."

Her husband, Louie Jarussi, who volunteered with the Peace Corps in Colombia in the 1960s, said he was greatly impressed by the respect and thanks the American volunteers received from the patients in Nicaragua. "The local population was very sincere and humble and showed us, through smiles and words, how much they greatly appreciated the things we tried to do for them."

Sampaga-Verdoia, for her part, said the Nicaragua trip, her first medical mission to another country, left a lasting impression on her and that she hopes to participate in additional medical mission trips in the future.

"I was able to see how grateful people were to be seen, how life-changing the surgeries were, and how people were impacted," she said. "Individuals with congenital defects were no longer seen as outcasts. People with severe hypertension were treated. And people with basic health questions were educated."

The August mission to Somoto, Nicaragua was organized by Rancho Mirage, Calif.-based International Medical Alliance, a non-profit group that organizes medical missions to Central or South America each year with the help of volunteers and donations of money and medical supplies. The group is planning its next mission in Esteli, Nicaragua next summer and hopes to recruit additional doctors and surgeons who specialize in cardiology, dermatology, urology and general internal medicine.

For more information on International Medical Alliance or to participate in an upcoming medical mission trip, please call (760) 485-8963 or visit its website at [www.internationalmedicalalliance.org](http://www.internationalmedicalalliance.org).