

Resident helps with relief efforts in Haiti

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Allen provided medical, dental assistance to quake victims

Following the earthquake in Haiti last month, Ines Allen saw the photos and news stories depicting ruin and chaos.

It did nothing, though, to prepare her for seeing it in person.

“From the minute you cross the border all you see is devastation,” she said Monday after nearly three weeks in the earthquake-shattered nation. “It's indescribable. People living in tents made of sheets. Kids dying. Helicopters flying (over) us.”

Allen, president of International Medical Alliance of Rancho Mirage, likened the situation there

While there, she served as volunteer with the Tzu Chi International Medical Association, a nonprofit group with U.S. offices in California that provides international relief.

She was one of about 12 people who, on a rotation basis, provided medical and dental assistance and chiropractic care.

“We saw 5,000 (people) a week. That's not even a dent of what the need is,” Allen said.

She hopes to return to Haiti at some point in the future with a cadre of doctors representing her own medical relief organization founded 10 years ago.

Right now, though, she is in the midst of organizing a medical mission to Somoto, Nicaragua, from July 29 to Aug. 8. Those plans started long before the earthquakes rocked Haiti and Chile.

“If I could I would have one team go to Nicaragua, one team go to Haiti and one team go to Chile,” Allen said.

But funds are limited and she's still struggling to garner enough support for the Nicaragua trip.

Her husband, Tracey Allen, co-founder of IMA, said he has heard from local doctors who want to go to Haiti and are looking for an organization with which to volunteer.

“If someone said we'll fund it ... we will go (to Haiti),” he said.

All the Third World countries Ines Allen has visited over the past 10 years with her organization did not compare to the need and devastation in Haiti, she said.

The Jan. 12 quake killed about 230,000 people and forced 1.2 million more from their homes.

From 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, Allen worked as a dental assistant under an outdoor tent and helped in the pharmacy when needed. After that, she would help distribute food.

With all she did, she still felt guilty that she wasn't doing enough.

"There's no water. There's so much trash everywhere. People are washing their clothes in the puddles in the streets," Allen said.

"What you see in the news doesn't compare to being there."