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Forward

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One Student at a Time

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Dr. Andy Johanson and a young patient are featured on the cover of *El Diario*, the local newspaper for Pereira, Colombia. Johanson and his wife, Wendy, were part of a Rotaplast mission in the South American city in September 2014.



Johanson Helping Change Lives with a Smile

By Linda Howell Skidmore

Seeing a child smile brings a whole new level of joy for Dr. Andy Johanson, '63. Since 2010, he has participated in Rotaplast, a non-profit humanitarian organization providing free reconstructive operations and treatment for children with cleft lips and palates worldwide.

Among the most common of all birth defects, cleft lips and palates occur when a baby's lip or mouth does not form properly. Children left untreated can suffer physical problems, such as hearing loss, and speech, dental and respiratory irregularities. Additionally, they often are ridiculed and rejected from society. Johanson says he holds a deep compassion for Rotaplast's goal to eliminate the incidence of untreated cleft lips and palates in children worldwide by the year 2025, and a belief in its slogan of "Saving Smiles, Changing Lives."

"In the U.S. because we have such easy access to facial reconstructive surgeries, we don't understand the social stigma it causes in other cultures that don't have the same access," Johanson says. "These surgeries are incredibly important because it gives those in need and their families a new lease on life."

The medical mission trips have taken Johanson to Pereira, Colombia in South America and Cebu, Philippines. There he is part of a team of

surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses and other volunteers from throughout the United States who each share their expertise to play an integral role in the surgeries.

As a psychotherapist, Johanson helps patients and families feel more at ease in the pre-operation waiting room by playing with the children and reassuring their parents of the surgical team's high level of competency.

At the time of the children's surgery, he carries them into the operating room and stays with them until they are under anesthesia. Since many of the surgeries take more than four hours, he seeks out the parents to let them know their children are doing well.

"After the patient awakes from surgery, I escort their parents into the recovery room and watch their expression of joy as they see their child's reconstructed face for the first time," he says. "It's

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— Dr. Andy Johanson

a very touching moment to observe.”

His wife, Wendy, shared in the experience in September 2014. The 13-day mission resulted in 58 major surgeries and a special memory for the couple.

"One of the children I was involved with was a 7-year-old boy who wanted the operation desperately," Johanson says. "He told me that he was teased in school so much because of his deformity that he stopped going to school. He wanted the operation so he could go back to school. When he saw himself in the mirror after his operation he cried from joy. This touched me deeply. Now he can go back to school and live a normal life."

In turn, Johanson says the missions allow him to reflect on his own life.

"The perseverance of those seeking these surgeries humbles me and puts my life in perspective," he says. "It helps me to re-evaluate the criteria by which I measure my own success. To know that I have been helpful in some way fills me with a sense of pride."

A practicing psychotherapist, ordained minister and adjunct professor at Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, Pa., Johanson delivered the Phipps Lecture in 2013 and was honored by the College with the Tower Award in 1995. He and his wife are the parents of five children. Johanson invites anyone interested in participating in a Rotaplast mission to email him at drandrewjohanson@gmail.com.