

BACKGROUNDER

Contact: Lisa Jones, Public Relations Coordinator
(757) 321-3252 or ljones@operationsmile.org
(Photos available upon request)

History of Operation Smile **1982-present**

In 1982, Dr. William P. Magee Jr., a plastic surgeon, and his wife, Kathleen S. Magee, a registered nurse, participated in an event that would forever change their lives - and the lives of thousands of children around the world. The Magees, who grew up in Fort Lee, NJ, were high school sweethearts who married in 1967. Dr. Magee received his Bachelor of Science degree from Mount St. Mary's College in Maryland, his D.D.S. from the University of Maryland, and his M.D. from George Washington University Medical School in 1972. While Dr. Magee pursued a medical career, they settled in Norfolk, Va., where they raised their five children.

"In 1982, we traveled to the Philippines with a group of medical volunteers to repair children's cleft lips and cleft palates. We discovered hundreds of children ravaged by deformities, and although we helped many children, we were forced to turn away the majority of those who sought help," said Dr. Bill Magee. What they found was overwhelming: hundreds of children ravaged by life-threatening deformities were waiting for the medical team— a teenager resting a massive facial tumor on her hand, a young boy with a bandana masking the disease that had already eaten away his mouth and nose, both surrounded by still more children suffering from severe burns and congenital hand deformities. In Naga City, approximately 300 families arrived hoping their children would receive surgery, but the team could only treat 40 children.

"Everywhere we turned, there was a sea of deformities," Kathy Magee said. "People pushed their babies at us, tugged at our sleeves with tears in their eyes and begged us to help their children."

As they prepared to leave the Philippines, the Magees made a promise they would return to help more children. The Magees saw the need and Operation Smile was born. Back in Norfolk, they solicited donations of surgical equipment and supplies from manufacturers, threw themselves into grassroots fund raising and put together a volunteer team of 18 doctors, nurses and technicians for their own mission to the Philippines. They were able to help approximately 100 patients, but again, hundreds more still waited.

-more-

"What began as an idea to help only a few children as grown into a network of volunteers and medical missions transforming thousands of lives," said Dr. Magee. "And the progression of smiles across the world is growing. As we continue to take care of thousands of children around the world, we give them a new chance at life, a chance they received because many people were willing to sacrifice a little bit of themselves for others in need."

Today, thousands of Operation Smile volunteers from around the world have treated more than 115,000 children and young adults and currently works in 26 developing countries worldwide. U.S. Chapters and student associations help raise funds and awareness for Operation Smile programs here and abroad. Educational efforts-from formal and hands-on surgical training to donations of equipment and technology-help health care professionals in each mission country move toward self-sufficiency. More than two-thirds of Operation Smile patients receive care year-round through local, in-country programs implemented by locally-based teams of medical professionals trained by Operation Smile.

In 1999, Operation Smile completed *World Journey of Hope '99*. Billed as the largest-ever surgical mission dedicated to correcting cleft lips and cleft palates, the nine-week *World Journey of Hope '99* brought 3,000 volunteers to 18 countries to treat more than 5,000 children. In 2007, during its 25th Anniversary, Operation Smile conducted *World Journey of Smiles (WJOS)*, simultaneous medical missions to 40 sites in 25 countries worldwide, which took place November 7-16, 2007. Free physical examinations were provided to 7,414 patients and 4,086 children born with cleft lips and cleft palates were provided free surgical treatment during WJOS. The initiative mobilized more than 1,700 volunteers from 44 countries and was the largest simultaneous medical mission of its kind.

Operation Smile offers new life and new hope. Its success is seen in the faces of the children who received care: a 15 year-old Filipino girl who had lived in hiding as a teen-ager because of a baseball-sized hernia of brain tissue dangling from her forehead returned to school after surgery; an infant girl in China abandoned in a garbage dump was rescued by a man who sacrificed his marriage to make sure the baby's cleft lip was repaired; a young man who borrowed money traveled for two days across Nicaragua in hopes that, when his cleft lip was repaired, he would receive a kiss from his father.

Guided by the generosity of thousands of dedicated volunteers and sponsors, the Magees-whose own children are now adults and still involved in Operation Smile efforts in their local communities-continue to dedicate themselves to helping children everywhere. The promise Bill and Kathy Magee made years ago will not be fulfilled until every child with a correctable facial deformity is given the chance to smile.

###