Giving the Gift of Dentistry

AGD Members Volunteer Locally and Globally

Academy of General Dentistry (AGD) member and humanitarian T. Bob Davis, DMD, MAGD, of Dallas, has been organizing annual international dental mission trips since 1977. He's currently looking ahead to his 41st group mission trip to San Raymundo, Guatemala, scheduled for March 17–25, 2017. In the past, Davis also has organized trips to Mexico and Nicaragua.

Davis hopes that more than 100 dental team members, including 80 or more dental students, will join him on the upcoming Guatemala trip. He estimates that over the past 40 years, well over 1,500 dental students and more than 500 dentists have taken dental mission trips with him. Typically, each group is comprised of students, dentists, hygienists, dental assistants, translators and other dental team members — sometimes with more than 100 volunteers, including 25 dentists, comprising the group.

"It's just a great experience for everybody," Davis says of the trips, particularly for dental students. "They see things that open their eyes to who they really can be and what they can do for people."

Stephen A. Sperry, DDS, of Omaha, Texas — a 2011 Baylor College of Dentistry alumnus and an orthodontic resident at Saint Louis University in St. Louis — has gone with Davis to Guatemala three times, as well as to Mexico and Nicaragua. He says the most rewarding part of each trip is providing free dental care to those who would otherwise not have access to it.

"I hope to work alongside Dr. Davis every year [in] Guatemala," Sperry says. "It changed my life, and I know it will do the same for all who participate."

Davis has observed that dental professionals are unique volunteers in that they can help fill an oral health care void. "Some of my friends want to go abroad, and they want to start churches and build houses, kitchens and bathrooms. I've stuck to just dental care — what we're gifted with. Nobody else can [provide oral health care] but a dentist. It's important that we concentrate our efforts on doing the dental care and impacting people with the gift that we have."

This month, *AGD Impact* spotlights AGD members who, like Davis, have given back to people in need of oral health care locally and globally.

AGD member and humanitarian T. Bob Davis, DMD, MAGD, of Dallas, is shown with volunteers from the spring 2016 mission trip to the San Raymundo Clinic in San Raymundo, Guatemala. Davis has been organizing annual international dental mission trips since 1977. *Photo submitted by Davis*

T. Bob Davis ▸

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT PLANNING YOUR FIRST MISSION TRIP

Davis offers this advice for mission trip novices:

1. Know what to expect. Before planning a mission trip, talk with someone who has already taken one about his or her past experience. Gather as much advice as possible before organizing your own trip.
2. Stock up on reference materials. Consult practical guides such as "Dental Mission Manual for Portable, Short-term Dental Trips (2015)."
3. Consider how exactly you want to be involved. Ask yourself: Do you want to travel with a small group on a trip lasting a few days, for a week or two, or for a month or more? Do you want to travel with a group organized by a hospital or dental school, or do you want to teach abroad while working?
4. Think about how you're going to fund your mission trip. "Some of them are funded by an organization; most dental mission trips, you fund yourself," Davis says. Visit Davis' website at *https://goo.gl/T1Atz8* to view a fundraising packet, which includes a sample fundraising letter, sample response cards and a donation summary form in order to track contributions.