

# Eye surgeon takes services where they are needed

By Marcus Brazier

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Eye surgeon Steve Spector recently left his West Palm Beach office for two weeks and traveled to the South Pacific to help hundreds who suffer from eye diseases with no ready source of medical treatment.

Spector traveled to one of the Vanuatu islands near Australia called Dffeata, and with the help of five students from Canada and Australia, he performed cataract and glaucoma procedures, eye lid reconstruction and removal of cancers from the eye lids.

When Spector and his crew arrived, they set up a field hospital first. But there were cultural obstacles to overcome.

The medical team had to convince the medicine men of Dffeata that the team's presence was not an invasion nor would it be harmful. Also, the people of the Malla village, strongly believe hospitals are a one way street: those who enter won't come out.

Spector's wife, Lauren, said operating in the field hospital lasted for about three days; from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. After learning the Melanesian people were afraid of hospitals, Spector decided to bring the clinic to the people. They set up their equipment in the Malla and Aircore villages and conducted the same procedures they performed in the field hospital.

Because of limited electricity, the surgeon and staff used portable microscopes, and other portable optical instruments for surgeries and examinations.

Even the chief of the Malla village was convinced and requested an eye examination.

While operating, "I asked for some music and they began singing *Jesus Loves Me* and tribal songs," Spector said. "I enjoy music, because it relaxes the patients and the operating staff."

One little boy had his sight restored following Spector's surgery, his wife said.

"Some of the saddest things I saw in Dffeata were the unattended blindness and the chil-



West Palm Beach eye surgeon Steve Spector is assisted by Ruth Kaltazara as they prepare a patient for cataract surgery in a clinic on the South Pacific island of Dffeata.

dren without education," said Spector.

Every spring since 1996, Spector has volunteered to provide eye care to people in need as a member of SEE International. He's been to Jordan, Africa, and across the U.S. with his services. The surgeons pay their own travel expenses and are provided equipment for the surgeries.

One challenging aspect is "we can't take all the fancy equipment provided," Spector said. "We must stick with basic surgical techniques."

One of the interesting things Spector saw on his most recent trip were land divers. Members of the local tribe jumped from platforms, ranging from 25 to 75 feet to make the land more fertile and to show courage. A rope tied to their feet prevented them from hitting the ground. The chief

jumps from the highest point.

Spector also is involved with Organization for Rehabilitation and Training, which builds and maintains technology schools around the world to give people a second chance in life and to learn a trade. The organization, started 100 years ago in Russia and it supports 270,000 students around the world.

Spector's next surgical visit will be to China.

"I try to go where the need is," said Spector. "It's a good feeling to help others. I've been blessed with a wonderful family, I have an opportunity to make a difference in people's lives and it's time for me to give back. I feel if everybody gave a little bit of themselves to the people around them, the world will be a much better place."

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