

When Volunteering is a Way of Life

This is part of a regular series on living a life of service outside the hospital.



Tony Amato, R.N., PACS administrator, on duty aboard the Africa Mercy, where he spent six weeks caring for patients in the post-anesthesia care unit. The former cruise ship has six operating rooms, an eight-bed recovery unit and a three-bed ICU.

Tony Amato, R.N., lives a life of service. When he's not at South Nassau serving as the PACS administrator, he's volunteering as a docent at the American Airpower Museum at Farmingdale's Republic Airport. Or he's volunteering as a firefighter for the Massapequa Fire Department. Or he's serving as a "guardian" for the Honor Flight Network, a non-profit organization that honors World War II veterans by transporting them to war memorials in Washington, D.C. Or he's assisting with disaster health service for the American Red Cross, which sent him to the Gulf Coast in the wake of hurricane Katrina.

But this past November he volunteered for a mission a bit farther from home. The Massapequa Park resident served as a post-anesthesia care unit nurse aboard one of the Mercy



Mr. Amato poses beside the Africa Mercy in Liberia, Africa.

Ships, hospital charity ships that provide medical care to the sick and poor abroad.

For the second time in two years, Mr. Amato's medical missionary trip took him to Liberia, a war-torn country on the west coast of Africa, where many of the children suffer from nomas, disfiguring flesh-eating tumors, and congenital abnormalities perhaps due to poor prenatal care.

"A lot of the surgical cases involved removing these nomas, repairing cleft lip and palate and dilating a swollen and scarred esophagus caused by eating soap made from caustic lye," said Mr. Amato, who has 11 years of experience working in South Nassau's Delivery Room, where he still works per diem.

He spent six weeks aboard the Africa Mercy in the ship's 8-bed recovery unit tending to patients whose lives have been transformed by surgery in more ways than one.

"Some of these village people believe that these nomas are caused by bad spirits and demons, so the people are ostracized and are forced to leave their villages," he said, "but when they come back cured, they are welcomed by the village and it's a new life for them."

Mr. Amato has his sights set on a 2010 medical mission with Project Hope, which partners with the U.S. Navy to provide humanitarian assistance aboard a hospital ship.

"When you go to one of these third-world countries, you learn that there is no place on Earth like the United States," he said. "It's so gratifying to be able to give back for all that I have."



Liberia is on Africa's west coast.

Quick Facts:

Life Expectancy:

Men= 45 years

Women = 47 years

Major infectious diseases:

Food or waterborne diseases: bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever

Vectorborne diseases:

Malaria and yellow fever