

NURSE

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said, a simple blessing would ease the patient’s mind.

“To them, if we could help them with their pain, that was fine,” she said. “But often, if there was nothing we could do, all we had to do was say a prayer and that was their medicine.”

In addition to the clinic days at the school, the nurses also set up mobile clinics and met people in their homes who couldn’t walk, Bacon said. They provided glasses and bifocals for those who needed them, and taught women’s health classes to the girls and counseled expectant mothers as well.

There were many differences between International Falls and Zambia, like the language, food, and the lack of the comforts of home, Bacon said. The nurses worked with translators who translated the native Demba for them, though most of the younger people spoke English, which they learned in school.

“The younger people spoke in Demba and English, and the elderly spoke mostly in Demba,” she said.

The group stayed in an old farmhouse owned by Hands at Work, a nonprofit partner organization of Nurses for Africa. The house was once owned by a copper mining family, and mining is a popular occupation in Zambia, Bacon said. It was winter while the volunteers were there, which was much different than the one Bacon was used to.

“Highs in the 80s during the day, but it really got cold at night,” she said. “It was



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Lisa Bacon, left, with a volunteer from Hands at Work and two members of Bacon’s volunteer team in Zambia. Hands at Work volunteers assist the nurses with translation and guide services.**

more like our summer here, so it really didn’t faze me.”

Bacon said she knew she wanted to volunteer and do mission work like this for a long time, but had waited for her kids to grow up first. Her church, St. Paul Lutheran, does a mission trip to Haiti, which she signed up for. While she waited to go, she found the Nurses for Africa program online and applied. She found out she was accepted last October, which led to extensive background checks and monthly conference calls to prepare, she said. Though the group met for the first time in Chicago on their way to Zambia, she said the experience helped them form a life-long bond.

“When we landed in Chicago we all went our separate ways, and we all became a team, and nobody understands what we went through but us, we did this experience together,” she said.

Two of the highlights of the trip were Kid’s Day and Care Worker Appreciation Day, Bacon said. For Kid’s Day, the nurses took the kids to a pool, a first-time experience for the children.

The kids also played games and received gifts like new clothes and soccer balls. Care Worker Appreciation Day honored the volunteers who worked with the nurses as translators and guides, she said.

This volunteer experience made her a better nurse, Bacon said, and she would “definitely” recommend it for other nurses looking to serve. It helped her grow as a person, and revealed things about herself she didn’t know.

“I was challenged on a number of things and I met those challenges,” she said. “I found out I could do more than I thought I could do.”

With the wide ranges of issues for which to advocate and try to change, it’s easy to be overwhelmed and not know where to start. But knowing the little things help is important, Bacon said.

“I’d like to think I made a difference, and I’m sure I did,” she said. “It’s a small ripple, it’s not this big, overwhelming, save the world type thing, but I made a small ripple along with my team.”

TESTING

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He said other cold boxes fluctuate in temperature, but the Falls’ box holds the frigid air well.

“Consistency is what we need,” he added. “If we make a change to a calibration and test it the next day, we need to make sure we’re starting at the exact same temperature.”

Pearson’s comments echo that of many big-name automotive companies across the world, Nevenen said.

“We have people come from Germany, Korea, United Kingdom, Australia... all over,” he said. “We really meet a lot of interesting people.”

While Pearson said he misses his wife, Emily, who remains in Chicago, he enjoys being able to spend so much time in International Falls working at a job he loves.

“It is great to be able to come back home for work,” Pearson said. “By the end of December, which is when we’re done with our testing campaign, I will have been in International Falls for work about five and a half months this year alone... And I get to stay with my mom and dad when I come here.”

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

After graduation in 2006, Pearson went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in automotive engineering technology from Mankato State University. Having been a mechanic most of his life, Pearson said the degree was a good fit and he looked forward to entering the work-

force. However, he said, the economy in 2009 didn’t present any opportunities in his field right away, so he moved back to International Falls to work at Carlson’s Auto and Falls Lumber.

In 2010, Pearson was introduced to Nevenen, who brought Pearson to meet with representatives of Navistar at the testing site.

“I gave them my resume and they sent it back to Chicago,” Pearson said. “The rest is history.”

Pearson is now working in the future product development division of his company, which is what brings him to International Falls.

“We work on different emission testing during different drive cycles,” Pearson said of one of the many components of his job.

His colleague, Nick Mukkada, who grew up in the suburbs of Chicago, said he has been with the company for seven years, but this is his first time working in International Falls.

“I like it here,” he said. “The people are really nice.”

Nevenen stressed it is the relationships the community creates with the cold weather testing companies that keeps them coming back.

“(Testers) are able to fly right into town, they have hotels to stay in, restaurants to eat in, we have everything they need,” Nevenen said.

Mukkada said he has traveled to many cities, but International Falls is a destination he prefers.

“Last night, when I dropped Spencer off at his house, we had apple crisp with his family. You don’t get that anywhere else,”

he said. “Driving down the road, I wave at people and they wave back, you definitely don’t get that in Chicago.”

ECONOMY BOOSTER

Nevenen said Pearson’s story is one of at least two that involves locals coming full circle — growing up in Borderland and returning for work in the cold weather testing field.

Nevenen said when he started managing the facility, he reached out to Steve Smerika, a high school classmate who was interning with a General Motors power train group.

“I called him up, he gave us a look and he was able to convince his superiors to bring a (testing) group to International Falls,” he said. “Having GM here really started a chain reaction.”

Nevenen said he estimates cold weather testing last year netted about \$1 million in revenue for the community.

“We try to document and track how much money is brought in as best we can,” he said.

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