

## VOSH-Southeast - A New Model of delivering eye health services

**John Gehrig and Susan Stees**

The Covid Pandemic wreaked havoc upon our Regional Chapters. VOSH-Southeast (V-SE) was not an exception. Moreover, our chapter received an additional crushing blow during October, 2021 caused by the passing of our co-founder, Charlie Covington. Charlie's legendary work organizing our chapter mission trips was, quite frankly, a fundamental part of our chapter's success. Charlie's loss, layered on top of the general paralysis caused by the pandemic, made our chapter's future look somewhat uncertain.

We felt we had to change or wither. Fortunately, our VOSH warehouse of resources was not empty. In fact, our **actual** V-SE warehouse, **The Tin Hut**, located in Ocala, Florida, has contributed to a surge in Southeast's impact in the field. Many readers will recall the Tin Hut as V/SE's repository from which we distribute refurbished equipment and glasses, frames and sunglasses to multiple optometry partner organizations in Central and South America. Continual support from The Tin Hut and our traveling VOSH team members has built the cordial relationships we have with our new optometry foundation partners in the Dominican Republic and SVOSH-Galileo in Guatemala and SVOSH-Eurohispano in Peru. The pandemic and the short-term loss of our mission clinic capacity forced us to look to our in-country partners to provide the additional humanitarian services we had been trying to add to their venues. We doubled and tripled down on the long-range support we had been giving. Their response was magnificent. Now we have reached the stage in our relationships where our optometric friends welcome our presence and support in the field with their own vision clinics. Thus, there are now multiple new

opportunities for our participation in clinics similar to those which, in the past, Charlie had created for us.



*Image 1*

*VOSH/Southeast clinic in collaboration with Daniel Hiraldo and One Ball One Village in the Dominican Republic, July 2022*

A wonderful fall-out from our new relationships is that V-SE now has the ability to provide opportunities for American nonprofits and NGOs to broaden and expand their capabilities to provide vision services in the areas where we work. An example is the partnership VOSH-Southeast formed with the non-profit “One Ball/One Village”. OBOV provides healthy water supplies and general medical services in underdeveloped regions. Just a few months ago, V/SE worked with OBOV in the Dominican Republic. supplying and staffing its first vision clinic. Also, V-SE has formed partnerships with two faith-based eye surgery organizations. We provide optometric support to their surgical clinics in Guatemala, Peru and Honduras. None of these new activities would be possible without the close relationships we have built with our optometric friends and supporters in these countries.

*Image 2 VOSH/Southeast clinic in Guatemala in collaboration with Mission El Faro in March 2022*



Our partners are now actually bringing to us new venue opportunities, such as Haiti, where we can begin to work closely with existing groups doing visual health work in the field. We look forward to our future - and you certainly are invited to join our efforts.

For more information on VOSH-Southeast please visit [www.vohsouteast.org/](http://www.vohsouteast.org/) or <https://www.facebook.com/VOSHSE/>