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Local Doctor Honors His Late Father, Leads Rebuilding of High School in India

KERALA, India – For more than 80 years, St. George’s Catholic High School has educated young people in this humid, poverty-ravaged village at the southwestern tip of India.

Due to limited community resources, it was not possible to maintain the building and it was in a terrible state of decay when a Dayton-area physician and his six brothers and sisters began to intervene. “I went back to India three years ago for a wedding, and we looked at the school and decided that something needed to be done,” said Joseph Mantil, MD, PhD, Washington Twp. resident and Medical Director for the Nuclear Medicine and PET Department at Kettering Medical Center (KMC). “It was falling apart.”

The doctor and his siblings all had a vested interest in the school where they had earned their high school diplomas. Their late father, Chacko Manthurathil, was the school’s very first Head Master, serving from 1926 to 1929 before going into politics and business. He died in 1995, and, thanks to the loving care of his children, his legacy brightly shines in a new place of learning.

“Joe (Dr. Mantil) was treated like a celebrity and a hero there,” said Wally Sackett, Vice President of Clinical Services for KMC. “There was a parade, and they just wore him out with trying to say thank you in every way they could. Later in the trip, we were all invited to a tour at the Presidential palace in Delhi, the capital of India. He deserved it all.”

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With Dr. Mantil's sister, Susan Pachikara, supervising construction, the family started from scratch and gave the school all the modern amenities. The family gathered at the school on Dec. 30, 2009, along with dignitaries and about 3,000 townspeople to celebrate the rebirth of St. George's High School.

More than five times its original size, the new St. Georges has a 1,000-seat auditorium which doubles as a gymnasium. It also has more than 50,000 square feet of learning space. There is a library with many more volumes than it had in the past, along with a computer lab with 20 workstations. Pat McGowan, a local businessman, paid for most of the computers, but the rest of the project was financed by Dr. Mantil and his siblings.

"It was one of the nicest things I have probably done in my life," Dr. Mantil said. "These people have nothing. The whole village was so excited. Ministers from the state of Kerala and members of parliament and the state legislature attended. The Catholic Church's Archbishop was there, and so was an Indian Supreme Court judge who was an alumnus of the school. A Federal Minister, Mr. Ravi, unveiled a new portrait of our father in the front lobby."

It was quite a homecoming for Dr. Mantil, who left India in 1958 to pursue a Master's Degree on a scholarship at the University of Detroit. He went on to get a PhD in Physics from Indiana University, then he met his wife, Joan, while doing research at Wright Patterson Air Force Base. Dr. Mantil came to Kettering Medical Center in 1982 after completing medical school and his residency at Wright State University and the University of Cincinnati.

Joan and Joseph Mantil attended the inauguration ceremony with their two daughters and several other family members. Also in attendance were Mantil's partner, Dr. Charles Peterson; Robert Willett, former President of KMC; and Sackett. "The dollars go a long way there," Sackett said. "Dr. Mantil was able to contribute essentially a new physical plant that is up to date with American standards, including internet access, computers and furnishings. For the students that will go there, this was a very significant change."

Later in the three-week trip, Dr. Mantil was joined by Sackett as he continued his practice of providing consultation and instruction for hospitals in his homeland. This time, the destination was Ramachandra Medical School and Medical Center in Chennai, India.

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They toured the facility and spoke with medical students, administrators and nursing students. Dr. Mantil, who was awarded the Silver Jubilee Award from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in 2004 and was also Wright State Alumni of the Year in 2008, answered questions and explained how things are done in American hospitals. Soon a delegation from the Indian hospital will come here to KMC to witness American healthcare first hand.

“They are very interested in our ideas and advice,” Sackett said. “The scope of what they are doing there and the needs are quite a bit different. I think we were careful not to present that the way we do things here is the way they should do things there. We did a lot of listening and providing feedback. They were very engaged and proud of what they were doing there.”

With more than one billion people in a land mass half the size of the US, clinicians at India’s hospitals are faced with significant challenges. They strive to provide the best care for each patient with the resources available. Family members assist in the care -- providing food, bathing the patient, changing the bed and assisting with communications as patient advocates.

For Dr. Mantil and for the people of his native India, faith and family have always sustained them as they have pursued greater well-being against significant odds.

“Faith plays a huge role in their culture every day—the clothes they wear, the food they eat and their daily practices,” Sackett said. “The healthcare professionals we interacted with encouraged spiritual culture, but they were careful not to show preference to one religious influence.”