

A Shining Light: Student Receives International Award

The Academy of Dentistry International (ADI), an international honor society dedicated to improving the lives of people around the world, has chosen Marshall Green, a 25-year old fourth-year dental student, to receive its 2009 Terry Tanaka Student Humanitarian Award. The award was created in honor of Dr. Tanaka whose “contributions to educational and humanitarian projects in local and developing foreign countries have been a shining light for the dental fraternity,” said Dr. Robert Ramus, executive director of the ADI.

This “shining light” is in stark contrast to Marshall’s life just three years ago. He was on the verge of failing his first year of dental school, had not received his scholarship funding and had broken up with his fiancée. Instead of making the world better through dentistry, he was making cocktails as a bartender in Baltimore, 1,200 miles from his hometown of Baton Rouge. He took a hard look at the broken elements of his life and knew things had to change.

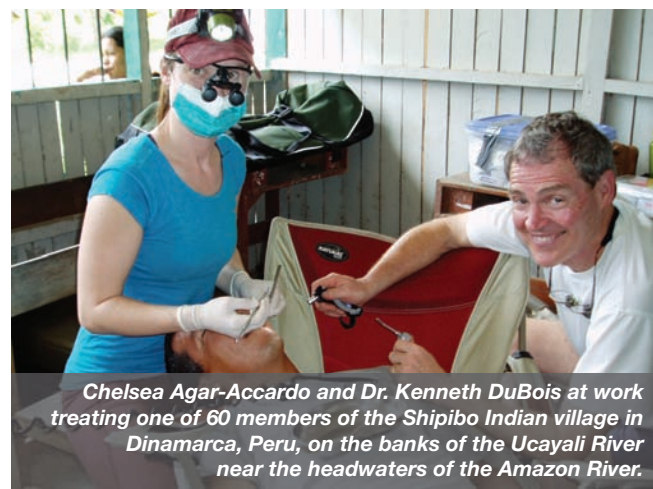
His transformation came as a result of serving on four medical missions to remote areas of India, Honduras, Mexico and Peru. His life now brims with memories of the 1,000 people he cared for, some



Marshall Green plays with children from the village of Kerala, India, who were “wonderful, polite and beautiful.”

of the poorest people on earth willing to trust him because of their pain.

That trust led to his doing things he did not know he was capable of doing, such as treating up to 80 patients a day. He’s learned to deeply embrace cultural diversity as a result of the slow



Chelsea Agar-Accardo and Dr. Kenneth DuBois at work treating one of 60 members of the Shipibo Indian village in Dinamarca, Peru, on the banks of the Ucayali River near the headwaters of the Amazon River.

communication process that often involved two translators. To counter the fear he saw in his patients’ eyes, he learned how essential it is to have a warm and genuine smile.

He was surprised by the overall good health of the people, even when their dental health is compromised. “So many of them have perfect blood pressure,” he said.

He learned right away that the concept of “clinic” often means a tin shack without electricity. As a result, he knows the tremendous value of having a hand-held, solar-powered portable drill.

Paradox of Life

More than anything, he’s rejuvenated by the paradox of life: the more he gives, the more he receives. “I used to think that life was about what I could get. My plan was to become a dentist and reap the financial rewards. Now I think about how much I can share those rewards with others.”

He’s benefited from outstanding dental mentors like Dr. Kenneth DuBois, clinical professor in the LSUSD Department of Comprehensive Dentistry; Dr. Shannon Allison, a New Orleans dentist and retired military member, who has spent months abroad providing care for the underserved; and also Dr. Bill Sasser, a leader of mission trips, who taught him the far-reaching consequences of treating patients without access to follow-up care.

As a result, Marshall learned not to start a dental treatment that can’t be finished, a hard lesson for a high-energy young man eager to make the world better. “People look to you to fix their problem,” he said when describing

the pain of an eight-year old boy in Honduras. “I had to stop, pull back and be guided by my limitations,” he added. “That kind of experience drives me to learn more.”

Marshall learned a lot by confronting fears. There was the night the engine broke on their small boat and the medical team floated on a foreign river while logs rumbled from a nearby landslide.

There was the confrontation with village elders who thought the medical team were “face peelers,” people who take away body parts to sell in other countries. That conflict ended when the medical team gathered the teeth and tissue and burned them in the presence of the villagers.

He’s delighted by how eager the locals were to learn how to do things for themselves, to set up their own clinics and organize community fluoride treatments.

Marshall’s life is different now. It’s filled with light and purpose and the mission of dentistry, the very reasons that the Tanaka Humanitarian Award was established by the Academy of Dentistry International.



Headed for Peru, are, from left, Dr. Dick DuBois, Marshall Green, Dr. Kenneth Dubois, Chelsea Agar-Accardo, Ryan May and Julia Cheuk



Off to work in the city of Pullcapa, Peru, are (from left) Walter, Peggy, Chelsea Agar-Accardo, Natalie, Dr. Kenneth DuBois, Julia Cheuk and Joseph. All were part of the mission team.