

# Art & Life

...it's Evanston

## Solidarity Bridge Is on a Road Less Taken

BY VICTORIA SCOTT

The headquarters of this cross-cultural service organization are in a converted loft in the sort of out-of-the-way location retailers optimistically call a "destination" – a place that must be travelled to on purpose rather than come upon by chance.

Those who turn down the alley and locate the door to Solidarity Bridge may find it a fitting entrance to this modest organization, dedicated to serving the poorest people in Bolivia, South America's poorest country.

From these Evanston headquarters a team of three Solidarity staff members coordinates seven programs dealing with urgent medical care, fair-trade market expansion and educational collaboration.

Solidarity Bridge sponsors four or five missions a year to Bolivia. On each medical mission a team of highly

skilled North American doctors and nurses partners with a Latin American team to help patients who need such specialized care as pacemaker implants, open heart surgery or neurosurgery.

Since the program's inception, Solidarity doctors have performed 1,459 operations and seen 10,151 patients in clinics and have brought to Bolivia more than \$5,889,000 worth of supplies, equipment and medicine. Of the 200 volunteers who have made the trip, some have gone many times.

Though its vision and goals are avowedly Christian, Solidarity Bridge accepts missionaries and recipients from any – or no – religious background. Jews, Sikhs and Muslims are among those who have served as volunteers.

The organization's founder and executive director, Juan Lorenzo Hinojosa, Ph.D., says he patterned Solidarity Bridge after a medical mission launched by Roman Catholics in the Joliet Archdiocese with the help of a Bolivian anesthesiologist.

Dr. Hinojosa, a native of Bolivia, approached a newly appointed Cardinal George with his idea in 1999. The Cardinal gave his blessing for the organization to become a mission of the laity of the Archdiocese of Chicago – on the condition that it be self-supporting and operate autonomously. Solidarity Bridge has its own board and the support of private donors and local Roman Catholic congregations, says Dr. Hinojosa.

A look around its Evanston headquarters points to the scope of the organization's activities. The main room accommodates a conference table and the desks of Dr. Hinojosa, associate director Ann Rhomberg and economic development coordinator Jennifer Moran – and also opens to a large warehouse.

The warehouse shelves, usually piled high with pharmaceuticals and medical equipment solicited from corporations by the non-profit clearinghouse Americare, is emptier than usual on this July day. Solidarity recently shipped a container – its first – with medical equipment valued at \$500,000 but actually worth four to five times that, says Dr. Hinojosa.

The container should arrive in Bolivia well in advance of a fall mission trip that will bring eight doctors (a dermatologist, a cardiologist, a neurologist, a pediatrician, two neurosurgeons and two gynecologists) and more supplies.

The warehouse is filling up again; last year donations of medical supplies, equipment and medicines totaled \$1,721,200, according to Solidarity's annual report. Dr. Hinojosa points to a pile of packaged heart pacemakers donated by Medtronic. Each package, not much bigger than a DVD, is worth between \$9,000 and \$11,000, he says – and that does not include the necessary leads, which cost some \$900 apiece.

Bolivia has a special need for pacemakers. Dr. Hinojosa notes that the country is number one in the world in the percentage of its population affected by Chagas disease. Chagas is caused by the bite of a bug that gets into



Solidarity Bridge founder, Juan Hinojosa beside some of the donated medical equipment the organization recently shipped to Bolivia.



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homes through holes in adobe or thatched roofs. Two million of Bolivia's nine million inhabitants show signs of the disease, which can cause an enlarged heart and slowed heartbeat, he says.

In Solidarity Bridge's pacemaker surgery program, social workers and cardiologists in one of the agency's several Bolivian offices assess patients' medical and socio-economic situations and then arrange for surgery. Working with their Bolivian counterparts, Solidarity doctors

implanted 105 pacemakers in 2007.

Solidarity Bridge also runs a neurosurgery program. Among the supplies in the office are bits for craniotomy drills the organization has contributed to hospitals in Santa Cruz and Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Medical education goes hand in hand with the organization's surgery projects. Side-by-side teaching occurs in operating rooms and group discussions, as American and Bolivian doctors work together. While general medical training is adequate in Bolivia, says Dr. Hinojosa, doctors usually have to leave the country for specialized education.

In an effort to boost economic development in Bolivia, Solidarity Bridge has also established a fair-trade program. Solidarity Clothing produces cotton polo shirts in four cooperatives that provide living wages for 80 people in the city of Cochabamba. The shirts can be embroidered with a team or school or company logo and are being marketed on a new website, [www.solidarityclothing.org](http://www.solidarityclothing.org).

Though Evanstonians may not recognize the name Solidarity Bridge, many know one missionary who will be on the fall trip. Father Robert Oldershaw, who retired recently as pastor of St. Nicholas Church, will be traveling again to Bolivia in October to serve as chaplain to an organization whose vision statement says it was founded "in a spirit of mutuality...[to] create a channel for the abundant good will and generosity of individuals and organizations to reach the poor."

Learn more about Solidarity Bridge at [www.solidaritybridge.org](http://www.solidaritybridge.org).

### Starlight Concert Series Continues

The Starlight Concert Series continues through July 29.

Starting at 7:30 p.m. on July 24 at James Park, Mulford Street and Dodge Avenue, hear the Toronto-based Reggae Cowboys' mix of West Indies and Wild West onstage.

The music returns to Dawes Park when Evanston's Ken Arlen Orchestra performs at 7:30 p.m. on July 29. Bring a blanket, pack a picnic and enjoy music under the stars. Refreshments are available for purchase. In case of rain, the concerts will be moved indoors. For the latest site information, call 847-448-8058 after 4 p.m. on concert day.

Evanston Starlight Concerts are presented by the City of Evanston's Cultural Arts Division and sponsored by Evanston Fourth of July Association, Chicago Public Radio, Chicago Reader, Quince at the Homestead and the Evanston RoundTable.

### Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre Stages 'Nina Simone'

Award-winning actress Yahdina U'Deen stars as Nina Simone in Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre's production of "Nina Simone: Between the Keys," opening July 26. Written and directed by Ebony Joy, the show is a musical journey that chronicles Ms. Simone's life and struggles, from child music prodigy to civil rights activist to international star.

Performances of "Nina Simone" are at 7 p.m. Saturdays and 3 p.m. Sundays, July 26-Aug. 10, at Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes St.

Tickets are \$15, \$10 for students with ID, and \$7 for seniors aged 55 and older. Group discounts are available. For more information, call 847-448-8260.

An African-American theatre company, Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre produces theatre and cultural events that address the African-American experience or reflect the culture of people of African descent.

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