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## Medical mission work serves dual purpose

**By Earl Vaughan Jr.**  
Staff writer

When Fayetteville's Dr. Bruce Steffes became involved in medical mission work more than 10 years ago, his purpose was to serve others, not earn recognition for himself.

But as of last weekend, he's managed to accomplish both.

The University of Toledo's College of Medicine recently held the induction ceremony for its sixth class of honorees in the school's Medical Mission Hall of Fame.

Steffes was among this year's three honorees as the result of his work with the Pan-African Academy of Christian Surgeons.

Steffes serves as chief executive officer for the organization, which, according to a news release, uses rural mission hospitals, volunteer surgeons and missionaries to teach surgical practices and increase the number of surgeons available in a continent in desperate need of them. Steffes worked with Fayetteville's Village Surgical Associates from 1982-97 before entering medical mission work.

Steffes said there typically is only one surgeon in Africa for every 250,000 people. By comparison, he said, that would be like a city the size of Fayetteville having only one surgeon for all of its residents.

In some areas of Africa, Steffes said there is only one surgeon for every three to four million people.

The organization Steffes works with trains surgeons to deal with a little bit of everything, from abdominal and vascular surgery to urology and obstetrics. "It's a very broad program that we're trying to get to them as a true rural surgeon," he said.

In addition to training surgeons, Steffes and his team also perform operations working on a hospital ship. On Monday, he left for a mission trip to Benin, where he will serve a surgical rotation on a hospital ship there.

The ship doesn't have the facilities to handle critically ill patients, Steffes said, but they can perform operations on things such as goiters and hernias, along with pediatric surgery to treat various congenital malformations.

Steffes said he'll be in Benin until August on his current tour, then will return to teach in the physician's assistant program at Methodist University.

Steffes, who is a member of Fayetteville's Village Baptist Church, said the reason he's willing to give so much of his time to this cause is simple.

"I realized what Jesus Christ has done for me has changed the way I look at everyone else and what is important in my life," he said.

Village Baptist helps provide some of the financial support for Steffes' mission program, something he is extremely appreciative of.

"Financial support is needed, but more important is the fact these people are praying for us, knowing you're not alone, that people are encouraging you, making a difference," he said.

Looking to the future, Steffes said he has a goal of training 100 surgeons for Africa by the year 2020. "That doesn't seem like much," he said, "but that's more surgeons than most countries in Africa have," he said. "If we can expand over the next few years to get the program on board, we could double or triple our output."

Steffes said continued financial support for the project is crucial. "For the amount of money it takes to keep a missionary in the field for one year, I can train somebody for five years who will stay for a lifetime," Steffes said. "Their people, their language, their culture. It makes a tremendous impact when we do this."

For further information on Dr. Steffes and his mission work, go to [www.brucesteffes.net](http://www.brucesteffes.net).

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Surgeons Bruce Steffes, right, and Mark Shrime remove a goiter from a patient aboard the M/V Africa Mercy in Cotonou, Benin. Steffes was inducted into the University of Toledo's College of Medicine's Medical Mission Hall of Fame.

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