

Siuslaw News
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Opinion

EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

CATHERINE J. ROURKE
For the Siuslaw News

Dick & Diane Anderson



After mending smiles for over 20 years, Diane and Richard Anderson, D.D.S., never imagined they would be brightening those of underprivileged kids in the Polynesian Islands. But their love of people and volunteer work as missionaries and humanitarian emissaries would eventually bring their dental expertise to some unexpected exotic places.

Long before the couple embarked on their international missions, their focus remained on small-town affairs, devoting decades of civic, community, faith-based and charitable stewardship.

Dick and Diane met over half a century ago during a church service in Southern California and married soon after. She dreamed of becoming a ballerina and studied dance while Dick attended the University of Southern California School of Dentistry in Los Angeles. After Dick graduated in 1962, the couple began searching for a small, friendly town where they could start a dental practice as well as a family.

"Choose where you want to live first and everything else will fall into place," Dick said. "Relocating for quality of life is just as important as for a job."

For the Andersons, Lake Arrowhead in the San Bernardino Mountains fulfilled that philosophy as a beautiful small town with four seasons and a lake in an area that needed a dentist. They spent 24 years there building their practice in the '60s and '70s. Diane trained as a dental assistant, helping Dick in the office while raising their four children.

Despite a busy practice and family life, the Andersons still found the time to remain active in community affairs and charitable endeavors.

A family vacation often meant visiting Southwest Indian reservations where Dick provided volunteer dental services. He also spearheaded "a monumental community campaign," resulting in a Citizen of the Year Award in 1976. But the area had become densely populated and the smog started rolling in.

"It was a good life, but it was time to move on," said Diane. "So we decided to get away from the rat race."

The Andersons yearned for a place that offered similar beauty, with lakes and a small-town atmosphere.

"After a long search, we found Florence in 1984," Dick said. "The people were so nice, and we felt at home right away."

The Andersons built an Old World-style home on Woahink Lake and turned it into a mini-farm "to learn self-sufficiency," complete with animals and a vegetable garden.

"It was lots of hard work and no income, but we learned a lot," Diane said.

Now that the Andersons had retired from their practice and their children were grown, they were free to devote their lives to full-time service. Their first trip in 2001 took them to New Zealand, where they spent six months as missionaries and then another year of volunteer work in Rarotonga on the Cook Islands in Polynesia.

"It was remote, primitive and the

lecting more than 1,000 toothbrushes and providing instruction to 4,000 children across three islands. Many had never seen a toothbrush before.

"The kids actually loved it," Diane said, describing schools consisting of a cement slab, with no textbooks or chairs. "I remember all these barefoot kids out in this big field brushing their teeth. It was a new toy at first, but then they started beaming their bright new smiles. It was truly a rewarding experience."

But Dick wanted to do more. "We might be saving their teeth for a day, but I wondered what would happen in the long run," he said. That's when Dick turned to his fellow Rotarians in Florence for help.

"We needed dental supplies in Rarotonga for a full year," he said. "So we worked through the club to get the district and regional Rotary clubs to obtain donations."

The Rotarians organized a dental outreach project and obtained grant funding from Rotary International. The Andersons returned to the islands in 2003 armed with 20,000 toothbrushes and dental equipment so Dick could provide more services.

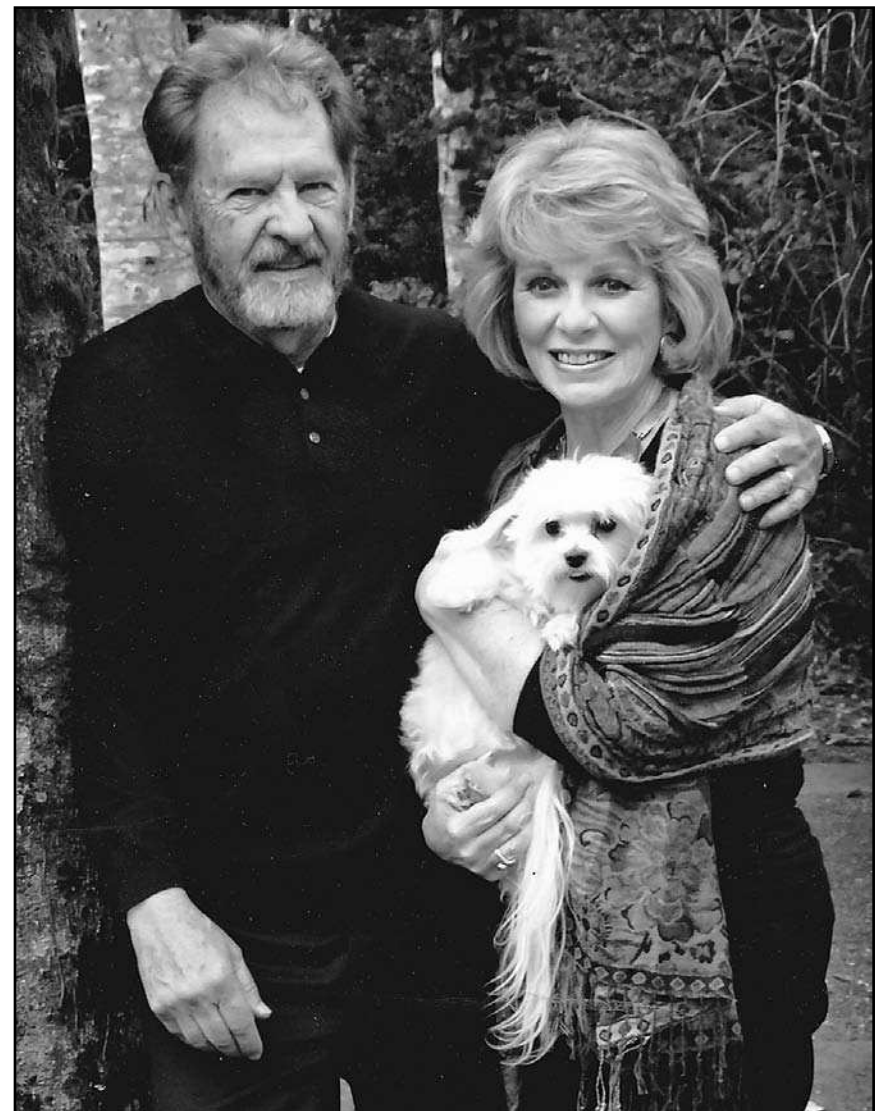
"They were so warm and gracious and treated us like family," Dick said. "If we could bring a smile to these wonderful people, we hope what we did is carrying on and enhancing their lives."

But the Andersons didn't stop there. Their humanitarian work expanded to Eastern Europe and the Middle East, working as emissaries with nonprofit, non-government agencies to bring relief to war-torn countries in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The couple delivered food, shoes, medical equipment and wheelchairs, plus water to a leper colony in Egypt.

"It was very fulfilling to help so many people," Dick said.

But it was also intimidating when the couple spent six months in Beirut, with constant bombs and explosions.

"I was terrified," Diane said. "War is a way of life there. We have so much here compared to other parts



COURTESY PHOTO

Florence residents Dick and Diane Anderson have supported many community projects since moving here in 1984.

"We just love people. True happiness comes from serving others."

—DICK & DIANE ANDERSON

experience of a lifetime," Diane said. "The people were dirt poor with no indoor plumbing. They had nothing."

They also had limited dentistry services. That's when Dick realized their need for dental hygiene.

"They had so little but so much in their hearts," he said. "We really wanted to help them."

The Andersons provided free dental hygiene and education to the schoolchildren for a full year, col-

of the world."

The Andersons finally returned home to Florence to continue their work. Dick served for 20 years on the Dunes City Council, as bishop of the LDS church, as president of the Western Lane Community Foundation and on countless boards. The couple also supported numerous community projects, including the Florence Events Center and the expansion of local emergency and surgical facilities at PeaceHealth Peace Harbor Medical Center.

"It's different to become directly involved instead of just writing a check," Dick said. "We simply want to spread the love in our hearts and wish we could do so much more for

everyone."

The couple, who recently celebrated their 54th anniversary, now reflect on their tireless endeavors together.

"We look at how blessed we are and want to pour out and do something for others," Diane said. "We just love people. True happiness comes from serving others."

Catherine J. Rourke is an award-winning writer, journalist and book editor who teaches creative writing at the Florence Regional Arts Alliance. She may be contacted at CJReditor@gmail.com.

LETTERS

Outpouring of support

Our hearts are full with the outpouring of kindness, prayers and support we have received from our community and friends during this time of great loss.

Your thoughtfulness means the world to us and has helped our healing begin. Thank you.

The Phil and Sue Davidson Family
Florence

Freedom of religion

As Easter approaches, it is important to remember that the United States is not now, and was never intended to be, a "Christian" nation. Although the authors of the U.S. Constitution were almost exclusively Christian, they included in the First Amendment to the Constitution the provision that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Politicians or others who seek to legislate on the basis of either "Christian values" or biblical

strictures are violating the fundamental principle on which this nation was founded. Those who complain about the removal of religious symbols from public property, or demand compulsory public prayer, are seeking to violate the basic principles that led to the formation of this country.

Religious freedom necessarily means the freedom to practice any religion or no religion. Among the worst nations of the world have been those that are theocracies, where one leader demands to be worshiped and obeyed by all. Iran, North Korea, Germany under Hitler,

the Soviet Union under Stalin, China under Mao, Western Europe under the Inquisition, and possibly Russia under Putin, are all examples of how state-sponsored religion has oppressed the populace.

It is perfectly acceptable to preach "Christian values" as long as it is recognized that these are personal values, rather than legal principals, and that many Christians may differ as to what they consider to be "Christian values."

Christians typically believe that Christ died to offer salvation to the world, but most Christians would not consider His death to jus-

tify exclusion, hatred or oppression of those who have not yet accepted the salvation offered by Christ.

Paul Floto
Florence

A shout out

The purpose of this letter is to compliment the staff in the surgical department at Peace Harbor Medical Center.

I literally got everything but a teddy bear and a kiss from mom. The entire staff was warm, professional, comforting and generous with their time and attention to my procedure.

I am sorry that I cannot remember all the names, but from entry assistance to RNs, anesthesiology and of course my physician Dr. Stauffer, everything went smooth.

The facility is clean, organized and professional. I am truly grateful for the excellent care I received.

James McDonald
Westlake

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor concerning issues affecting the Florence area and Lane County. Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters should be limited to about 300 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone number for verification. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received. Libelous and anonymous letters as well as poetry will not be published. All submissions become the property of Siuslaw News and will not be returned. **Write to: Editor@TheSiuslawNews.com**

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