

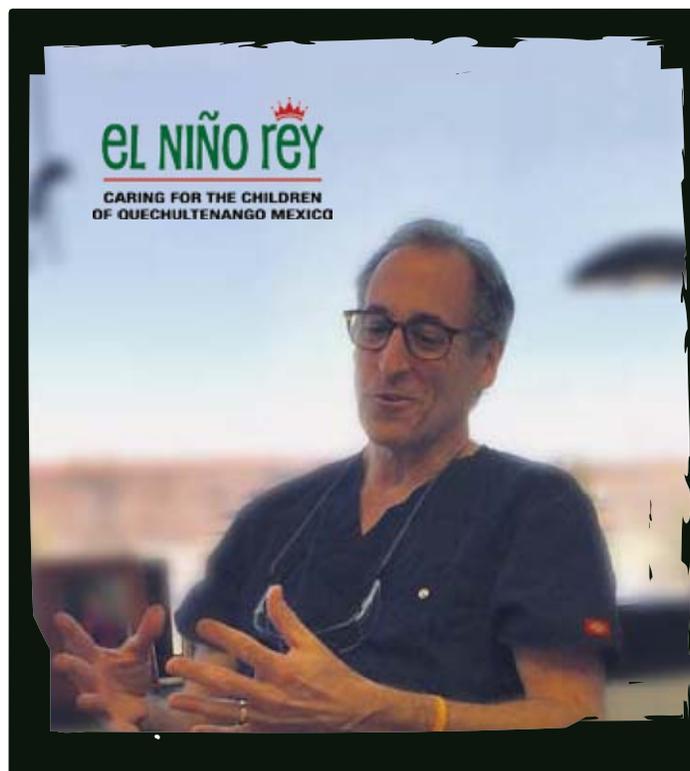
ON A MISSION...

THE FOLLOWING IS AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. AUGUST DURSO, WHO HAS SERVED AS A COMMUNITY DENTIST IN MOUNT PROSPECT, IL SINCE 1989. DR. DURSO TRAVELS TO MEXICO EACH YEAR TO PERFORM DENTAL WORK IN IMPOVERISHED AREAS, IN CONJUNCTION WITH EL NIÑO REY.

It all started in 1984 when I got out of dental school. My dad, who was a physician, was involved with The Convent Of The Holy Spirit. He called me one afternoon and said he had an elderly nun who was physically unable to get out of bed, but she had a really bad toothache. He asked if I would come take a look. So, I said, "Sure!" I went there and the tooth ended up having to be extracted. This "care as needed" process went on for a few years, where if there was an issue at the convent, I would just go there and take care of it.

In about 1988 they had put in a nursing unit for the elderly nuns. The nurse who was in charge brought me in and asked if there was any way I could do something for them on a more regular basis. They had the space for a facility, so I had a dental chair donated to the convent and they purchased some portable dental equipment. This way I would have the proper space and equipment to see all the nuns. I still go once per month. I really enjoy helping them out; they're missionary sisters so they've been all over the world. Some of the ones I'm seeing now, for example, have lived in Ghana for forty years and they're coming back here to retire.

My daughter, grandson, and I bring my dog Olive to the convent as a service dog. She's so friendly with everybody that we just bring her there and all the nuns



get to pet her and feed her. Now with a grandson, I'm not sure who is more popular- the dog, or the baby! They're both pretty popular.

In 2005, I was introduced to some dentists involved in a group called El Nino Rey, which was started by a group of dentists from a parish in Northbrook, Illinois in collaboration with a priest there, Father Matt Foley. Father Matt was stationed in a parish in Quechultenango, Mexico,

for six years and while he was there he saw great need for education and dental care. He started talking with the dentists he knew and they said, "Well, maybe there's something we can do to help." They went down there with bare bones equipment and did extractions and things like that.

They came back and started putting together other aspects of El Nino Rey which was the educational part. There was a need to get kids in school

and keep them in school.

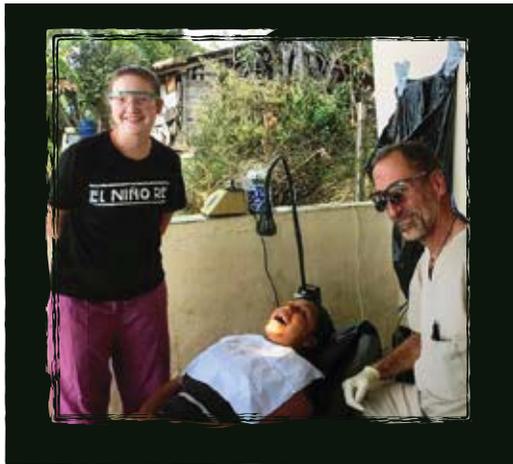
He started getting donations and used the funds to create a program where he gets the students to stay in school by incentivizing their education. All of the money that gets donated, other than buying large equipment, goes to that part of the program.

It's grown into this twice-per-year event where we get a group together. It's usually five dentists, a hygienist, and

then volunteers and we go as a group. We have a central base in Quechultenango where all of our equipment is stored. We throw all of our equipment onto two trucks and we are driven into villages in the mountains. We set up a dental clinic and treat patients all day long. We find a central village and people from surrounding villages can come to us. We work for a week straight and treat all of the people that come to the clinic.

Sometimes we're even able to repair teeth, rather than just pull them. For example, we treated a sixteen-year-old young man who is just starting to socialize and wants to find a girlfriend, but when he smiled all you could see were these black holes in his teeth. Now, we can go there and repair those, so that he now smiles for the first time in a long time and he really smiles. It makes a big difference.

I've been with El Nino Rey for twelve years now and have gone on ten mission trips. A lot of my drive comes from my upbringing in the Jesuit tradition; being men and women for others. I just get a really good feeling from helping other people.



DR. DURSO, SHOWN WITH THE OTHER VOLUNTEERS FOR EL NINO REY CARING FOR LOCALS OF QUECHULTENANGO, MEXICO

