



# The Wisconsin Medical Project

August 2021

## NEWSLETTER

### **Visit to Redgranite**

*New Partnership with the Durable Medical Equipment Project at Redgranite Correctional Institution Expands WMP's Supply of Donatable Assistance Devices*

The demand for wheelchairs and other mobility equipment always exceeds the supply. We were therefore pleased to learn about the Durable Medical Equipment industry which is part of the Bureau of Correctional Enterprises (BCE) and works at Redgranite Correctional Institution in the Wisconsin Department of Corrections. The program at Redgranite, which provides inmates with both pay and valuable professional skills, allowed us to purchase many rehabilitated wheelchairs and other mobility assist devices at a reduced price this past winter. In addition, they are able to supply us with "specialty" chairs equipped to adapt to size and seating position that we do not often receive as donations. Twenty-five wheelchairs were sent to Cuba and 18 to Ghana in February. More are ready for the two containers



Repairing a walker (L-R) Jack, Kennedy, Andrea & Bernie

we plan to ship this summer.

Bernie Micke, Jack Kenny, and Andrea Kenny visited the workshop on July 15. The shop employs up to 14 inmates who clean and sanitize walkers, power and manual wheel chairs, scooters, hospital beds, Hoyer lifts, and other medical equipment. Everything is taken apart down to the last screw and ball bearing. Careful notes and drawings are made so that it will all go back together again. Drawings that one of the workers showed us were true works of art in terms of the care and detail that went into them.

Quality assurance checks are rigorous. The refurbished devices from Redgranite compare

*See Visit on p. 2*

**Dear Friends and Supporters,**

**This is the second year that we will not have our Annual Warehouse Fundraising Party. Despite Covid, we have been able to collect donations of equipment and supplies and to ship filled containers to Africa and Cuba. We are asking for your continued generous support to make this all possible.**

**This is how we use your financial gifts:**

- **Our primary expense is the warehouse rent at \$1200 per month**
- **Shipping costs per container can be \$5000 to \$6000, occasionally shared by sponsoring groups**
- **Insurance**
- **We purchase voltage converters so that the equipment we send can be operated in other countries. We also purchase specialty light bulbs and batteries as needed. These can be very difficult to find in the countries to which we send our donated equipment.**
- **We also purchase rehabbed wheelchairs from Badger State Industries, part of the WI Dept. of Corrections training program**

**We are a 100% volunteer operated organization. All of your gift goes toward fulfilling our mission. You can read more about our on-going work in this newsletter.**

**Please consider supporting our work.**

- **Checks may be mailed in the enclosed envelope to:**  
**Wisconsin Medical Project**  
**26 N. Prospect Avenue**  
**Madison, WI 53726**
- **Donate on-line at our website:**  
**<https://wismedproject.org/>**

**A BIG THANK YOU FOR YOUR PAST AND CONTINUING SUPPORT!!!**

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Although we will not be getting together with you at the warehouse again this year, please know that we are continuing the work that you have supported. ♦ Our container to Ghana is in the provincial capital of Kumasi and is being distributed to small regional centers. Dr Ama Koranteng reports that the recipients are pleased with the donations. ♦ Our container to Cuba is in Camagüey and is being distributed by our contact, Dr Nacyra. To their credit the Cubans have developed their own 3-part COVID-19 vaccine which is reaching our friends there. ♦ We continue to receive donations from local hospitals, health organizations and individuals. ♦ The world-wide maldistribution of sea containers due to COVID-19 has delayed our next planned shipments. We are working with our shipper to get things moved to Senegal and Ivory Coast. ♦ Thank you to our volunteer sorters, packers, and container loaders. ♦ We hope you can continue your generous support. We appreciate all of you.

*Bernie Micke, M.D.*

### Visit Continued

favorably to new medical equipment. We were also pleased to learn that they could use the various extra wheelchair parts that had accumulated over the years in the warehouse.

The men who work on the refurbishing project also receive valuable job search and technical skills. Christine Trinrud, the supervisor of the Durable Medical Equipment project (DME), explained that the hiring process is like that of any other company: She posts job openings and accepts applications, checks references, and interviews prospective inmate employees. Each of the men has a workbench and is trained to use the tools and power equipment in the shop – a large, well-lit, and ventilated warehouse facility. The men we talked to were obviously proud of their work and the skills they had developed.

During lunch we answered questions about the WMP and explained where we had sent their wheelchairs. Marcellus spoke for several when he told us that it made a difference to know his work was helping others. It made him feel good.

Wes Ray, BCE Director, Warden Dan Cromwell, and Terry Ferstl, who supervises six BCE teams (5 at other facilities), explained that BCE gets only \$50,000 of WI tax dollars and that amount is only to support the DME work. All other programs must be self-sustaining. They produce a variety of products for sale to government agencies and non-profits such as the WMP. Inmates who work in BCE shops must have a high school diploma or a GED/HSED certificate and have had no major rule violations for 12 months. A transition team connects them to employers in the community on their release. The work habits developed in these programs have a positive impact on the participants: 88% of BCE workers are employed 3 years after re-lease. We're pleased to make the connection with DME and this mutually beneficial partnership.

### CUBA UPDATE – Ricardo Gonzales

On Sunday, July 11 thousands of people in more than forty cities across the Island took to the streets to protest against the Cuban government. Why so many people and why now? To be sure it is a complicated situation. There is no doubt that the cumulative effect of 60 years of embargo policy by the United States account for much of the discontent.

Those of us who travel to Cuba regularly know the positive effects that the Obama opening had on the standard of living of the Cuban people. Since 2009 unlimited remittances to be sent by Amer-

icans, enabled the burgeoning private sector that created thousands of small businesses all across the Island. One could see and feel the improvements although many bureaucratic controls and difficulties getting raw materials and supplies remained. There was hope in the air.

Trump would bring most of that to an end imposing additional sanctions -- drastically reducing commercial and charter flights from the US, ending Western Union's operations in Cuba, and virtually outlawing the sending of family remittances not just from the US, but from anywhere in the world for example. Cuba still hung in there, but shortages became more acute, especially food, fuel, and medicines in shorter supply. Then COVID-19 struck.

Initially Cuba held its own, even helping other nations cope with the pandemic. However, around March of this year the Cuban government lifted some restrictions on tourism as a way to bring needed income and supplies. This opening backfired, leading to more infections, and the medical infrastructure nearly collapsed, causing great distress and discontent among the population. The number of deaths skyrocketed

While economic hardships are in my opinion the driving force of the protests, it is undeniable that a new generation of Cubans want change. There is also a cry for personal and political freedom that cannot be ignored. The Biden Administration has not yet rolled back some of the most harmful measures. The administration needs to find a way to re-engage with Havana and find ways to calm things down and avoid the worsening humanitarian crisis, which will have untold consequences for both Cuba and the United States.

*Ricardo Gonzales was born in Cuba and founded the Madison-Camaguey Sister City Association*

### News from the Warehouse

- We have packed & sorted over 1500 cartons since January and continue to receive donations
- We loaded & shipped 2 containers in the first half of 2021 -- one to Cuba and one to Ghana. Both have arrived at their destination.
- Two additional shipments were scheduled to go to Africa in July but our shipper could not locate any containers due to covid disruptions in the shipping industry. As soon as we get containers, we will send these to Senegal and Ivory Coast.