



**Dr. Salz and his wife Dr. Linda Hsueh in Ghana**

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B'water family restores sight of cataract patients in Ghana

BRIDGEWATER -- Two ophthalmologists from Bridgewater who went to Africa to restore sight to dozens of people also ended up seeing the power of volunteerism by a family.

The powerful trip resulted when Linda Hsueh, of Summit Medical Group in Berkeley Heights, and her husband, Alan Salz, who has a private practice on Union Avenue, were inspired by their daughter, Lauren, to visit Ghana.

Lauren Salz, 19, decided to take a year off between graduating from The Pingry School in the Martinsville section and starting Barnard College in New York City. During that time she did a few volunteer stints, including three months at an orphanage in Ghana, in western Africa.



**Lauren Salz and her brother Alex with the children at the orphanage**

Her family timed their journey there, from July 26 to Aug. 5, to coincide with the end of Salz's stay. Salz's youngest brother, Alex, 16, decided to spend the week with his sister, helping at the orphanage.

Salz's parents, and older brother, David, 22, a second-year medical student at Boston University, coordinated with Unite for Sight, a U.S.-based organization whose mission is to reduce treatable blindness in the Third World. David Salz decided to serve as the eye doctors' assistant.

The medical mission was meant to change the lives of their patients by helping restore sight to the blind. The journey also changed the lives of the Bridgewater family.

"For all of us to see how different it was for people in their day-to-day lives there, to see the conditions they live in -- the things we take for granted are unavailable," Alan Salz said.

So, during their weeklong stay, the family tried to provide one of those things they take for granted -- medical care.

The cataract patients whom Alan Salz and Hsueh saw during their Ghana trip normally could not afford the corrective surgery. Their blindness, though treatable, was considered a fact of life, Salz said.

Prior to the Salz family trip, a Unite for Sight team visited local villages and schools near Tamale, a small city in northern Ghana, looking for people with vision problems. The potential patients were sent to a clinic in Tamale.

In many cases, Alan Salz and Hsueh saw patients with cataracts that had gone untreated, or who had cataracts in both eyes.

When Alan Salz and Hsueh examined patients' eyes with a pen light, the patients' pupils often were white -- a sign that a cataract has obscured vision. The obstruction was bad enough that those patients could see only a shadow when a hand waved in front of their faces, Hsueh said.

Hsueh and Alan Salz restored sight to 30 patients through the free surgeries. The doctor duo wanted to do more, but there were complications.

"Lauren has prepared us about how basic conditions were, but to actually go there and just see that there was a drought going on -- there wasn't running water even if there was (plumbing) available," Hsueh said.

That included the hospital, where Hsueh was surprised to learn they would be operating without running water, she said. Plus, the power was intermittent.

The doctors, who worked side by side in the operating room, brought some of their own instruments and had to depend on alcohol gel to sanitize their hands.

Using a manual surgery technique that was popular decades ago, the doctors removed the cataract film clouding the lens of patients' eyes.

Although Ghana's official language is English, many of the patients did not speak it.

The patients, many of them barefoot, were led into the operation room. But when they returned for post-surgery checkups, they saw themselves into the examination rooms. They smiled, repeatedly shook hands and sometimes bowed when they saw the doctors.

"It was a wonderful experience having our family do it together," Hsueh said. "It really makes you look at things very, very differently. I've always thought we live in a community where everybody has so much. Even though we teach our

children how lucky they are, to really experience it makes all the difference in the world."

\* On the Web

To learn more about Unite for Sight, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to reduce treatable blindness in the Third World, go to: [www.uniteforsight.org](http://www.uniteforsight.org).

Kara L. Richardson can be reached at (908)707-3186 or [krichard@c-n.com](mailto:krichard@c-n.com).

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**Dr. Salz and a happy Patient**



**Dr. Salz (left), his son David (middle) and Dr. Hsueh**