

## **Saving Children's Sight in Eritrea**

A child facing a life of blindness just breaks your heart. "Blind children have so many challenges and become a substantial burden on their families and community" notes Dr. Judy Newman, a senior pediatric ophthalmologist from Texas who travels the world sharing her skills and expertise. In April, she visited Asmara, Eritrea, a tiny country in the horn of Africa surrounded by the Red Sea, Sudan, and Ethiopia with a population of only 3 million, but with more than its share of children facing blindness. IEF's Victoria Sheffield noted that "Dr. Desbele, the Chief Ophthalmologist at the Birhan Eye Hospital in Asmara, has been asking us to help find a pediatric ophthalmologist to work alongside his wife Dr. Ghenet 'because she is the one who takes care of the children.'" Taking along suitcases full of clinical and surgical supplies generously donated by Valleylab, Alcon, New World Medical, Marchon Eye Wear, Ronald and Marla Rushing and Dietz McLean Optical, Dr. Newman made the lengthy journey to Asmara for a two week visit.

They worked as a team to address each child's eye problem. She summed up her experience this way, "The two doctors with whom I worked are really dedicated to their people. They are eminently trained and certified ophthalmologists and have a special clinic day just for children, unusual for a poor hospital in a developing African country. I was impressed by how much pediatric eye disease, inherited, acquired and traumatic that we saw such as congenital cataracts, glaucoma and squint. The daily number of serious eye injury cases in children, which Dr. Desbele repairs, astounds me. Impressive was Dr. Ghenet's quick grasp of pediatric ophthalmic concepts and the skill with which both doctors maximized their sparsely equipped but well maintained facility to practice a high level of ophthalmology."

Dr. Ghenet's beautiful smile and Dr. Desbele's innate kindness reassure the patients that everything possible will be done for their loved ones. They were an inspiration to me..." Dr. Desbele said in a phone call to IEF, "She really taught us a lot and the children of Eritrea will benefit so much." Dr. Newman exemplifies IEF founder Dr. John Harry King's vision of "the promotion of peace through the prevention of blindness."