

It's Go, Go, Go!

Energetic octogenarian thrives on global volunteerism.

BY MITCH MIRKIN, CTM

If one day world peace is achieved, people like Nick Hoesl, ATMB, can probably claim a bit of the credit.

Back in the 1960s, the Cincinnati, Ohio, resident took a break from his retail pharmacy career to spend two years as a Peace Corps volunteer in the hot, rugged environs of Jalalabad, Afghanistan, teaching pharmacology to Afghan medical students. And in 2000, some 15 years before the United States and Cuba restored relations, he took part in a Peace Corps public-health

"I'm always looking for something new. I know people who are bored to tears, and they can't seem to find a remedy."

— Nick Hoesl, ATMB

study on the Caribbean island. In May, this active 83-year-old is planning to embark on yet another Peace Corps trip, this one to Iran, even amid the continuing tense relations between his own country and that Mideast nation.

All told, Hoesl has spent time in more than 40 countries. Most of his trips are "working vacations" during which he performs some form of volunteer service. What has all the globetrotting taught the spry retiree? "It's made me more aware of the fact that we're all one people," Hoesl says. "We all come from the same ancestors, if you go back far enough." He says he firmly believes that "people are the same all over the world."

Putting Language Skills to Use

Hoesl finds that he doesn't have to be on foreign soil to reach out across cultures. A few years ago, he helped resettle an Afghan mother and her seven children in Cincinnati, his



As a Peace Corps volunteer, Nick Hoesl, far right, went to Afghanistan in the '60s to teach pharmacology.

hometown. Her husband had been killed by the Taliban. Hoesl put to use some of the Farsi he had learned decades earlier for his Peace Corps mission.

"They came through the airport and didn't speak a word of English," he says of the family. "I nurtured them along until they were on their feet. It was a great experience."

Lately, he's again been brushing up on his Farsi, with an eye toward his upcoming trip to Iran. While he's delivered hundreds of talks throughout the years—in Toastmasters and in community settings—Hoesl says one of his most memorable was, in fact, delivered in Farsi. "The hardest five-minute speech I ever gave was in Peace Corps training in Portland [Oregon]," he says. "We had to give our speech in Farsi."

Hoesl has also toiled at Spanish over the years in preparation for medical missions and other volunteer trips to Honduras, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. He doesn't claim fluency in any foreign tongue, but he does take pride in his ability to connect with people around the globe despite language barriers. "I love dealing with people one-on-one, and I always look for a chance to communicate."

Humor is Universal

One of the communication tools he uses is humor. "It's a universal language," he says. "You don't even have to understand someone else's language to pull it off."

Humor has been the hub of Hoesl's speechmaking in recent years. He joined the West Hills Toastmasters club in Cincinnati in 1964 and, except for a 15-year hiatus, he's been active in the club ever since. His wife, Ginny, also a member, earned an ATM Bronze, and both have served in various roles, including club president.

The couple likes to visit other clubs when traveling. "Members welcome us with open arms," says Nick. "We don't want to be treated as guests, though—we always ask to be put on the meeting agenda."