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Alumni Profile

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John Creasman: miracle worker



John Paul Creasman '59

John Paul Creasman '59 is a miracle worker to the thousands of people whose eyesight he has helped restore.

Creasman, assistant professor in ophthalmology and department chair at the Mayo Clinic in Arizona, has devoted his life to humanitarian work and education around the world. Over the past 35 years, he has regularly offered his skills and materials in underserved areas of Africa, the North Pacific and South America.

Last year, Creasman received the Mayo Clinic Alumni Association Humanitarian Award for his contributions to medicine, education and medical humanitarian missions.

"Most of the blindness in the world today is due to cataracts, and that's easy to rectify," said Creasman, who, after graduating from Linfield College, earned his medical degree from Baylor University College of Medicine. "And the rewards for the patient, and for me as well, are dramatic. It's exciting to watch people see for the first time in many years."

Humanitarian work is second nature to Creasman, who grew up near the San Carlos Indian reservation in southeastern Arizona and often helped his parents provide food, clothing and shelter for those in need.

"You don't just take, you give back," Creasman said. "I wouldn't know how to do it any other way."

His primary focus has been a small clinic in Vera Cruz, Baja, Mexico, which he founded in 1972 and travels to several times every year.

"On the very first trip we started seeing patients under a mesquite tree," he said. "We see people from all over. They hear we're coming and they show up."

Over the past 35 years, he has coordinated

community building projects and recruited a dentist, a family practitioner and a nurse practitioner to help him provide care. In addition to hands-on patient care, Creasman is a proponent of medical education and has hosted conferences for physicians around the world.

His love of science took hold in a Melrose laboratory during his first rainy winter in Oregon. Although he initially came to Linfield to play baseball, he took zoology from Jane Claire Dirks-Edmunds in the off-season and was hooked.

"Everything was so clear and concise, it was impossible not to learn," he said. "Other than my parents, she was the first instructor who really taught me how to think, process and ask the questions, 'Why' and 'What difference does it make?' When March rolled around, I forgot about baseball."

Instead, he double majored in chemistry and biology, participated on the debate team and served as student body president, thriving in Linfield's familial atmosphere. Years later, he helped establish an endowed fund in ecology at Linfield in the name of Dirks-Edmunds.

"I would have disappeared into the woodwork at a large university," said Creasman, who, during his first week on campus, was invited to play pool with then-President Harry Dillin.

"He said, 'The back door's always open. Come over any time you want,'" Creasman recalled. "Linfield was literally like a family in many ways. Many of my Linfield classmates are still my closest friends today. In this environment you make friends that last."

— Laura Davis

John Creasman '59, right, assistant professor in ophthalmology at the Mayo Clinic, examines a patient before surgery in Micronesia. Creasman traveled to the island of Yap, Micronesia, for the first time in 2003 to evaluate need and hopes to return next year with a team of volunteers.

