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## Unsung Hero: Work in Honduras earns hero award

By Bob Zientara/Staff Writer  
 Published: Saturday, June 20, 2009 12:01 AM CDT

Editor's note: Each year, The Tribune solicits nominations from the community for its Unsung Heroes awards, which honor people who give generously but quietly of their time and talents to help others.

The Tribune received dozens of nominations, and a panel made up of Tribune staff and community members selected eight for awards this year. One of those eight is our Citizen of the Year. Unsung Heroes come from all walks of life and contribute in myriad ways, but the thread that unites them all is their spirit of giving.

Beginning June 13 and concluding with the Citizen of the Year Sunday, June 21, The Tribune will introduce you to these remarkable people.



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By Nirmalendu Majumdar/The Tribune  
 Dr. Dean Harms, a semiretired ophthalmologist and Rotary Club member, was selected as a 2009 Unsung Hero.

Unsung Hero is a title that Dr. Dean Harms richly deserves, according to Chuck and Carolyn Jons, who nominated the longtime Ames ophthalmologist for The Tribune's annual salute to community volunteerism.

The Jons' know Harms through Rotary Club, the international business and professional service organization, which has two Ames clubs: one that meets Wednesday mornings at the Iowa State University Memorial Union (Carolyn Jons' club), and one that meets at noon Mondays at the Gateway Center (Chuck's club).

"I've known him between 20 and 25 years," said Chuck Jons, a retired physician who once worked with Harms.

"When I started working with Dean on service projects, I was just another volunteer looking for work to do."

Harms, who was president of the roughly 70-member morning club from July 2003 through June 2004, said he got involved with Rotary "because it's a service group, and I was looking for ways to get involved."

That search, and a friendship with the late Doug Perry, a Florida resident whom Harms had met while serving in the U.S. Air Force, led him (with Chuck and Carolyn Jons tagging along) to the Central American country of Honduras.

"When I met Doug, he was an ophthalmologist, and I was a general practitioner," Harms said. "After he retired, he started a mission to Honduras."

Perry's death might have ended that work, but Harms, his partner, Dr. Lou Scallon, and Perry's wife, Maxine, decided to cooperate to keep the project going.

"My first time in Honduras was six years ago in 2003," Harms said. "I've been going there, off and on, ever since. Lou and I do eye surgeries, mostly cataracts, but some other procedures, too."

Chuck and Carolyn Jons went along on one of Harms' Honduras adventures, and what had started as an outreach to people in need of eye surgery grew to something far bigger.

The focus was on the Honduran town of El Porvenir, a community located about 50 miles northwest of the capital city of Tegucigalpa. There was a school in El Porvenir, but not much in the way of reading materials.

By that time, former Tribune editor Dave Kraemer had become president of the morning Rotary Club.

"He challenged us to get involved with international projects that emphasized our mission to build literacy," Harms said.

Harms did the math, combining an international project with literacy and his Honduras connections, and came up with the idea of a high school library for El Porvenir.

"The Ames Public Library worked with me, and we put together a couple boxes of books," Carolyn Jons said.

Chuck Jons said he busied himself with shelving and paint to help get the already-finished library building ready for its new book collection.

Once news got out around El Porvenir, the residents began showing up unannounced and that started the very best part of the

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project, Carolyn Jons said.

"Relating to the people was the best thing we did," she said. "We ended up reading aloud to entire groups of families. But I loved it when the children started reading to me. When you can let your hair down and make those connections, that's the best."

Harms said what fuels his passion for the Honduras work "is the fact that I'm doing what motivated me to become a doctor. You're using your skills where they're needed. There's no politics, no financial questions, just you and a patient who needs your help."

**Dean Harms**

Age: 66

Address: 2020 Philadelphia St., Ames

Birthplace: Alden

Family: Wife, Mary, native of Colo; son Philip, 40, Minneapolis; daughter Sarah, 36, Waconia, Minn.; Son Mark, 33, Madison, Wis.

Fun fact: Harms' youngest son, Mark, is a highly rated triathlete.

Why he volunteers: "I'm doing what motivated me to become a doctor. You're using your skills where they're needed. There's no politics, no financial questions, just you and a patient who needs your help."

Bob Zientara can be reached at (515) 663-6961, or [rzientara@amestrib.com](mailto:rzientara@amestrib.com).

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**Avis Pohl** wrote on Jun 21, 2009 5:17 PM:

" I have always been very proud of Dean and Mary for the many quiet voluntary contributions they make. I'm sure that our entire extended family joins me in thanking the community of Ames for recognizing this wonderful couple. "

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