It’s been 40 years since the first group of physicians and surgeons from Mercy Medical Center – Des Moines answered the call to help children they didn’t know on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. Since then, physicians, nurses and volunteers from Pediatric Cardiology, PC, Iowa Heart Center, Mercy Medical Center–Des Moines and other centers around the country have worked together to make the annual trip to Mexico and provide much-needed cardiac care and surgery to children in need.

In the late 1970s, Mercy heart surgeons Dr. Steven Phillips and Dr. Robert Zeff were approached by a dentist from Perry who had provided humanitarian dental care to children and adults in Merida, Yucatan. Through the dentist’s travels, he discovered children with heart defects and no medical facility capable of performing heart surgery near them. Some children were on a waiting list to have surgery in Mexico City, but most families could not afford the expense to travel to Mexico City.

In 1978, with the assistance of $5,000 donated by Dr. Zeff’s family, and the help of Dr. John Gay and Patricia Clare, Mercy’s Yucatan heart program was created. Dr. Gay traveled to Merida to evaluate patients for heart surgery at Mercy. The first patient came to Mercy for surgery in 1978, with 12 more patients arriving in 1979.

The surgeries were a success and word about the program spread. Soon, the program included the cities of Campeche and Cancun, though Cancun was only part of the project for a brief time.

Dr. Basaviah Chandramouli, now a retired pediatric cardiologist, joined the Yucatan project in 1981. He alternated trips to the Yucatan in January and July with Dr. Gay, along with the surgeons from Dr. Phillips’ team. The local physicians in Campeche and Merida would collaborate with Mercy providers and screen around 300 potential patients by obtaining X-rays and EKGs prior to the clinic dates. In time, the University of Iowa cardiology group joined the Yucatan project by helping in the clinics and providing electrophysiology studies.

In 1982, Des Moines philanthropist Stan Reynolds pitched the idea of an international heart program to Variety Club, and the Variety International Lifeline Cardiac Program was started, with Mercy being one of the two original centers. There are now more than 20 programs providing cardiac surgery in countries around the world in the Variety International Lifeline program.

This article is part one of a four-series article. Look for its continuation in the next edition of The Bulletin.
HAVE A HEART: JOIN A HEART WALK TEAM

Mercy and Iowa Heart Center are proud to sponsor and participate in the 2018 Central Iowa Heart Walk, a non-competitive one- or three-mile walk which promotes physical activity and heart-healthy living in a fun, family environment. It is a time of celebration for those who have made lifestyle changes and encourages many more to take the pledge to live healthier lifestyles while raising the dollars needed to fund life-saving research and education, advocate for health and save lives. This year’s event will take place on Saturday, April 21, at Meredith Plaza (1716 Locust St.), with opening ceremonies at 9 a.m. and the walk at 10 a.m.

Join a Mercy Heart Walk Team and show your support for our patients, their families and this worthy cause! Participants who register and make a donation of at least $20 will receive a Mercy Team T-shirt from local retailer Raygun. Free food and activities will be available along with prizes (iPad and Fitbit) for participants who sign-in at the Mercy tent the day of the event.

A 5K run – Heart Dash at Dusk – on Friday, April 20, is also taking place for you runners! Check-in is at 5:30 p.m. with the race starting at 6 p.m. There is a $35 registration fee that goes toward the team fundraising total and includes a race shirt from the America Heart Association (you will also receive the Mercy T-shirt as well). A post-race celebration will take place at Jasper Winery, where the race ends.

If you need more information about the events, view the event details here. For questions, please contact Jennifer Wagner, Wellness Center, at jwagner@mercydesmoines.org or 643-8659.

CELEBRATE WITH MERCY COLLEGE APRIL 16

The work is complete and it’s time to celebrate the opening of Mercy College of Health Science’s new Academic Center for Excellence, located at 921 6th Ave. in Des Moines. On Monday, April 16, from 4-7 p.m., Mercy College will host a community open house. A brief dedication program will be held at 5:30 p.m. to officially open the center.

The Academic Center for Excellence is home to state-of-the-art classrooms and laboratories. Additional faculty offices and academic services including Admissions, Registrar, Financial Aid and the Josephine Norkaitis Student Success Center are also located in the new facility.

Completion of the center marks the first time Mercy College of Health Sciences has had all of its academic programs located within a two-block area on 6th Avenue. This makes college programs and facilities more accessible to current and prospective students. Third party developers have also created new housing options for students who want to live near the campus.

All are invited to join in celebrating this wonderful achievement. Please RSVP at http://www.mchs.edu/ACE.