

ON A MISSION

Area Zonta Clubs Join Forces for Healthy Births

by Linda S. Hopkins

What can you do with a plastic sheet, a piece of soap, two gloves, three gauze squares, and a sterile scalpel? Add three strings and you can safely deliver a baby.

People who live in the United States, where babies are delivered in clean, comfortable hospitals or birthing centers, are astonished to learn that these simple items are a luxury for mothers in developing countries. Perhaps even more astonishing is the fact that over a half million women will die this year as a result of childbirth, and four million babies will not survive the first month of life. Why? Partly because of unsanitary birthing conditions.

In an effort to offset both maternal and neonatal mortality statistics, Zonta clubs of Hilton Head Island, Bluffton, Beaufort and Savannah are joining forces to provide clean birthing kits to women in Honduras. "I think we all take for granted what we have in this country," said Andrea Easler, local real estate attorney and chairperson of the Hilton Head Island club's service committee. "To think that a kit that weighs four ounces can actually provide for a clean birth is remarkable, and the fact that they are so thankful to have these small articles is mind boggling."

Over the next few months, area Zontians will be putting together 2,000 of the kits to be distributed to health organizations in Honduras which, in turn,

will make these supplies available to midwives who carry out the majority of deliveries. The clubs have already begun collecting the items needed and, thanks to the generosity of area hardware stores, hotels and medical facilities, it looks like all the supplies will be donated. "At this point, our biggest challenge is shipping," said Andrea.

In February, the women will gather to assemble and seal the kits. Participants will take particular care to ensure that everything is sanitary. According to Andrea, a member of the Hilton Head Island club who works at the hospital has arranged to have someone from infectious services there to make sure everything is done exactly right.

"We're really looking forward to this, not only from a service standpoint, but for the fellowship as well," said Andrea. To my knowledge, we have not had a setting where the four clubs have all gotten together. This will be good for us all to get to know each other and be working toward a common goal."

Although a new undertaking for the local clubs, the birthing kit project is an established service project, started in Australia in 1999 by the Zonta club of the Adelaide Hills, whose members initially distributed 100 kits in rural Papua New Guinea. Since that time, over 15,000 kits have been provided to 12 provinces in PNG. Through the efforts of Zonta and other NGOs, over 260,000 kits have been distributed worldwide.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

You can help make a difference in the lives of women in our community and throughout the world by supporting the efforts of your local Zonta Club. For more information about the birthing kit project or to make a donation toward shipping, please contact Andrea Easler at 843-689-6277.



For more information about Zonta International, visit www.zonta.org.

Become a member by contacting the club nearest you:

Hilton Head Island: at www.zontahhi.org

Bluffton: www.zontaofbluffton.com

Beaufort: www.zonta-district11.org/2SCBeau.htm

Savannah: <http://members.tripod.com/Fandrich/>

WHAT IS ZONTA?

Zonta International is a global organization of executives and professionals, working together to advance the status of women worldwide. Since 1919, Zontians have been working around the world to improve the lives of women through global service and advocacy efforts designed to prevent violence against women, increase access to education and healthcare, and expand economic self sufficiency. Today, Zonta has more than 33,000 members in over 1,240 clubs in 67 countries and geographic areas.

Local clubs establish their own service projects in response to community needs as well as international concerns. "We try to touch every age group and make sure that every project we have fits our mission.

Even though we do local service here, we felt it was important to have an international project as well," said Andrea of the birthing kit project.

"It's important for us to realize that we are not so far removed from this woman who is giving birth in rural Honduras," she continued. "Until you belong to an organization that reminds you of that on a daily basis, you really don't think about it. It's very important to think about the rest of the world, and also to have that common bond with women throughout the world. It [Zonta] has absolutely enriched my life beyond anything I could have imagined."

