

Welcome to
Better Health

A Weekly Update
for Asante Employees

Every patient,
every day, every time.

ASANTE® News

ASANTE ASHLAND COMMUNITY HOSPITAL | ASANTE PHYSICIAN PARTNERS | ASANTE ROGUE REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER | ASANTE THREE RIVERS MEDICAL CENTER

Asante Couple Get Mixed Impression of Cuba

Asante employees Allan and Catherine Henrichs spent eight days last month in Cuba, newly emerging from more than 50 years of U.S. trade restrictions, and came away with contrasting images of the island nation.



First, it's a poor country. Housing is scarce, roads and infrastructure are in disrepair, and consumer goods – or even a meal in a restaurant – are beyond the reach of most.

But the education system is excellent and free, all the way to post-graduate degrees. And the health-care system, while lacking in up-to-date technology, can show the U.S. a few things about affordable care.

“The Cuban government has wisely decided to put their limited resources into primary care and prevention,” Allan and Catherine said in an email to Asante News. “The

result is universal access to health care, very high vaccination rates, universal prenatal care and attention to the primary care of people with chronic disease.

“Infant mortality and life expectancy is as good or better than that of the United States,” the Henrichses said.

The couple both work for Asante Rogue Regional Medical Center's Laboratory Services – Catherine as a special chemistry technical specialist, and Allan as a microbiology technical specialist. They were in Cuba from Jan. 10 through Jan. 17 as part of a [People to People International](#) cultural exchange program. The organization was founded in 1956 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, to promote international understanding and friendship through educational, cultural and humanitarian activities.

Catherine's and Allan's group included 16 health-care professionals – social workers, medical laboratory scientists, a physician and an ICU nurse. Their mornings were filled with tours of health-care and government facilities, and lectures on subjects including the Cuban health-care system, the Cuban Society of Social Workers and Cuban “health-care diplomacy.” They visited an HIV/AIDS education center, CENESEX (the national sex education center, dedicated to promoting tolerance of the LGBT community), a Cuban version of a senior center and a polyclinic – an outpatient facility for general medicine.



The trip was arranged prior to President Obama's historic pledge on Dec. 17 to reestablish diplomatic relations with Cuba and lift U.S. trade sanctions that have been in effect since October 1960. Obama ordered an easing of travel restrictions that went into effect as the People to People

International group visited the island, and Catherine and Allan said they noticed a sense of optimism among the Cubans they met.

“Our impression is that the vast majority of Cubans are very excited about better relations with the United States,” the Henrichses said. “They feel that this will mean a better economy and a better life for the Cuban people.

“The government has been blaming all of Cuba’s economic woes on the embargo, so it will be interesting to see what will happen if things do not improve.”



During afternoons and evenings, Catherine and Allan toured the island, visiting attractions including old Havana, the Hemingway museum, a restored natural area outside of Havana, and a church that houses the “black virgin of Regla” and combines elements of Catholicism and African religions. They saw various revolutionary slogans, and pictures of Fidel and Raul Castro, and Che Guevara, were common.

Accommodations were “very nice,” restaurant food was good and plentiful, musicians were

everywhere and the Cuban people were friendly and happy to talk with Americans.

“We experienced a historical moment during our time there,” Catherine and Allan said. “On the Thursday before our Saturday departure, our guide received a text that Americans would be allowed to bring in (to the U.S.) \$400 worth of goods, \$100 of alcohol and/or tobacco.

“Many members of our group scurried to find stores to purchase goods before leaving,” they said. “And yes, we did bring back some rum.”

Asante News is published every Tuesday. Deadline for submission of articles is every Friday. Send via e-mail to asantenews@asante.org.

Question or suggestions: Call Communications and Marketing at (541) 789-3510 or extension 13510.