

# Medicines for Humanity... & Hope

## making a difference

by Emily Goodman-Simeone and Dick Weisberg

While working in international aid 25 years ago, Tim Bilodeau, of Hull, had an epiphany: there were 6 million children under the age of 5 dying of preventable illnesses each year around the world. Compelled to take action, Tim mobilized efforts that would ultimately become Medicines for Humanity (MFH), a not-for-profit organization that provides critically needed health services to children and mothers around the globe.

In the organization's early stages, Tim sourced medicines from overseas manufacturers and shipped them directly to project sites, bypassing cost-prohibitive, U.S. commercial price increases and extra expenses incurred via customs — a business model he called *MedShare*, which provided medicines to large non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well.

As *MedShare's* initiatives started to evolve, it became clear that one of the best ways to save children's lives was through health education at the community level. Cultural norms, customs, and in many cases, superstitions are intricately connected to familial healthcare decisions. Parental inaction is often due to lack of knowledge, rather than lack of care. The community health worker (CHW) model, which trains village volunteers nominated by community leaders on basic ways to recognize at-risk and critically ill children without high tech equipment, became central to Tim's approach for saving lives. This collaborative spirit is the foundation of MFH's success. Today, Medicines for Humanity has more than 52 child survival projects in eight countries around the world: Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Kenya, Malawi, Sudan, and Zambia.

### From Hoops to Healthcare

Dick Weisberg, Pinehills resident, former MFH board member, and its current development director, met Tim through their sons who were, at that time, in sixth grade and playing youth travel basketball out of Hingham. Dick agreed to coach alongside Tim, and a friendship formed over successful seasons together. At one end-of-season pizza party, Dick remembers shaking Tim's hand and saying, "This has been great; let's stay in touch." To this, Tim smiled and replied, "Oh, I already have an idea for us."



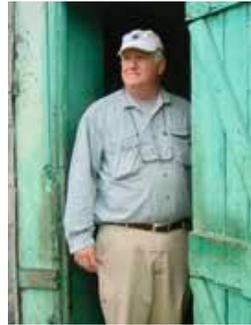
Mother and baby in Sudan

Tim and Dick in DR

Although Dick had no experience in international healthcare, Tim sought his organizational and marketing skills. "Coach, we need a guy like you," he said to Dick. And the rest is history.

In 2002, Dick accompanied Tim to a rural part of central Dominican Republic where sugar cane workers and their families were living and working, and child mortality was high. For four pesos a day, workers cut cane by hand with machetes to eke out a living and returned home to barracks that lacked plumbing and electricity. A community of Catholic sisters was operating an outpost and had raised enough money to hire a doctor and buy a van from which they provided medical care to the workers and their families who were living below the poverty line in plantation villages called "bateyes." The sisters and MFH saw this "mobile clinic" as a solution to saving kids' lives when they got sick, because traveling into town to seek medical care was too far and too challenging for families on the bateyes. For more than 15 years now, the mobile clinic continues to travel to different bateyes daily. Parents with sick children gather as the sisters hand out numbered tickets to those waiting by the van to see the doctor and receive medical services on site.

"The first time I witnessed the need there I recall thinking: *These people have to choose. Do I get medicine for my child, or do I buy food to feed my family because I haven't got enough money for both?*"



Quisqueya mobile clinic

Partner in Cameroon

Mother in Cameroon collecting a day's worth of water

### A Global Impact

The Ministries of Health in many of the countries where MFH works can be politically encumbered and limited. Fortunately, where governments are restricted, MFH is not. Subsequently, MFH created a curriculum for training community health workers in the Dominican Republic, which the ministry recognized and gave it official certification.

“The work we do is so meaningful to me and so compelling,” says Dick of the intimate and organic nature of MFH’s operations. In each project site, a ripple effect ensues resulting directly from MFH’s focus on sustainability through infrastructure and education. Some of the community health workers have even been motivated to pursue medical careers.

### Ways to Help

As a board member, Dick worked

alongside Tim, melding their creative and business acumen. Development is a necessary component of MFH’s success — an area that Dick continues to be intricately involved in. As MFH’s footprint grows in various countries, more *boots on the ground* are needed.

The COVID-19 crisis has affected some of MFH’s project communities more than others; and the organization went into overdrive in March, creating and sending educational materials along with personal protective equipment (PPE) to project sites. Global staff meetings continue to occur Mondays at 11 am to allow in-country personnel to share the latest information so that staff can stay on top of the pandemic around the world.

MFH is effective and efficient — 88 cents of every dollar raised is spent on *direct* services to beneficiaries

and projects. “A few years ago, during a visit to the mobile clinic project in the Dominican Republic, our project partner, Sister Concepcion, told us that not one child died that year due to lack of health-care,” Dick proudly shares.

You can learn more about Medicines for Humanity on their website: [medicinesforhumanity.org](http://medicinesforhumanity.org). There are opportunities to make donations for specific projects and interventions as well as general funding which allows staff to address critical needs as they arise. There is also the option to dedicate a donation to MFH as a gift in a loved one’s honor.

If you want to volunteer to help MFH reduce child mortality from preventable illness, one of the best ways is to help spread the word and raise awareness about the need, the important work that this organization does, and their global impact.

*“Being involved with MFH has made me a citizen of the world. It expanded my horizons and has greatly contributed to the quality of my life. For me, this experience continues to be extremely meaningful and rewarding.”*

# Dick Weisberg's Reflection Upon Tim Bilodeau's Passing



**Editor's Note:** *Trailside Living* learned that, several days prior to publication, Tim Bilodeau unexpectedly passed away. Pinehills resident Dick Weisberg, Tim's longtime friend and colleague who also co-authored this issue's **Making a Difference** article, shares his thoughts with his community:

*Tim enriched my life in ways I had never imagined before meeting him. He took me on adventures to places I would never have visited and introduced me to people I would never have known. He shared his deep compassion for others. He showed me again and again that a small, committed group of dreamers could bring about positive change. And in the case of Medicines for Humanity, those changes helped save lives.*

*His presence was larger than life, yet his humility always preceded him. He had a boisterous personality and loved a good time, holding court and regaling all with his jokes. He taught me so much about life and how to live a good one. His legacy will continue each time a child's life is saved at MFH projects around the world, and his memory will always be a blessing.*