

The administrator: ‘It’s a privilege to serve the poor’

Record-Journal reporter Dan Champagne recently spent nine days in La Romana, Dominican Republic, with missionaries from this area. Here is another installment of his Dominican Journal.



Stories and photos by
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EVERY TIME a child is born at The Good Samaritan Hospital, Moises Sifren thinks of his mother. If only the hospital had existed 20 years ago, she might still be alive to witness her son’s accomplishments.

Sifren, the administrator of The Good Samaritan Hospital in La Romana, Dominican Republic, was born in Batey La Cejas after his parents emigrated from Haiti to become sugarcane farmers. He described his childhood village as very poor, but very spiritual.

He was the second of 10 children. Most nights, there was only food for six, so he and his siblings had to have quick hands at the table or they would go hungry for the night.

While pregnant with her 10th child, Sifren’s mother began to have complications. Her blood pressure soared and her husband took her to a public hospital in La Romana.

The doctors were on strike. She was given some medication and told she was fine.

She wasn’t fine.

Her husband decided to bring her to a private hospital. She died on the way and the baby was delivered by Caesarean delivery just minutes after she took her last breath. The child, appropriately, was named Miracle.

The death had an immediate impact on the village and the local church. The Rev. Jean Luc Pharnord, a Baptist minister from Haiti who died in a



John Powers, left, of Wallingford, and Moises Sifren, administrator of The Good Samaritan Hospital in La Romana, Dominican Republic.

plane crash in the Queens section of New York in November 2001, was the family’s pastor.

With her death, the dream for The Good Samaritan Hospital was born.

“That really moved the whole church,” said Sifren, 36. “It encouraged Jean Luc to build a hospital where the doctors would never go on strike and would never send a pregnant woman away.” Volunteers and church groups have steadily worked on construction of the hospital since 1990, building it up from a garbage dump to a full-service facility that treats around 60,000 patients each year.

When it came time to name an administrator, Sifren was a popular choice. The hospital was dedicated on Nov. 9, 1997. Sifren was just 27 years old and had no experience in the field. “They told me I have leadership,” he said through a thick accent. “They thought the hospital needed this and that Moises could do the job. I was not nervous, even though I had never done anything like this before. I knew that God would provide me with anything I needed.

“For me, I think it’s a gift from God,” Sifren said. “I’m helping people in the same situation I was in as a kid. It’s a privilege to serve the poor in this hospital.”

“Put here for areason”

Sifren is a powerful man in La Romana, but he doesn’t flaunt it. When he arrives at work sites, young Dominican men who may have been chatting with young female missionaries suddenly grab shovels and dig in the dirt.

His smile is wide, bright and infectious and he has a large cleft in his chin. He has the spirit of a child and the responsibilities of a nation.

He is an addiction; once you meet him, he leaves you wanting more.

“He’s one of the happiest guys I know,” said the Rev. William Huegel of the First Baptist Church of Wallingford. “He’s got this buoyancy and energy about him. He has a deep faith in Christ that comes from his toes up.” “When you’ve been through what he’s been through, you know he was put here for a reason,” said John Powers, a Wallingford resident and member of the hospital’s board of directors. “He remembers names and he jokes with the group members. After Pastor Phanord passed away, Moises really took over and did the things that had to get done.” Sifren learned English through school and by working as a golf caddy at Casa de Campo, a swanky resort in La Romana.

“I had to learn it,” he said. “No good English, no good tip.” He attended a local computer college and recently received his master’s degree in business administration. He plans to go back to school to get his master’s degree in hospital administration. He was a computer programmer at a clothing factory in La Romana before being selected as the hospital’s administrator.

Sifren has a quiet confidence about him, and that was apparent while driving through the sugarcane fields, delivering lunch to the various work teams. The dirt paths have no markings, so directions come from memory. On this particular day, Sifren forgot the way.

“I know we will get there, but I don’t know where we’re going,” he said.

It’s that confidence, or sheer faith, that helps him organize the 36 missionary groups that arrive from around the United States each year to help with the hospital, medical clinics or construction in the sugarcane villages.

“The big thing for me is to be able to have patience,” he said. “There is a lot going on all the time, but it is worth it to have everyone come here and help.” “The hospital he runs is a hospital for the people,” Powers said. “I picture him as a beacon of light or hope for the people here.” A hope that sprang from his mother’s death.