

ANGEL IN BLUE SCRUBS LONE TREE DOCTOR STARTED NONPROFIT FACE THE CHALLENGE

Robert Sanchez

To hear people talk about him, you'd think Dr. Randy Robinson is an angel in blue surgical scrubs - minus the wings.

Sure, the Lone Tree-based doctor spends much of his time on cosmetic surgeries such as hair transplants and face-lifts, but the 43-year-old father of three with a straightforward Midwestern style has always searched for a higher meaning in his life.

He has the resume of a do-gooder: He patented a jaw-lengthening device that has been used successfully on 11 patients. He performs free facial surgeries on poor children. He was Resident of the Year in medical school.

Colleagues said **Robinson** is a brilliant man, who executes his work with the skill of Michaelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel ceiling. His wife, Ginger Robinson, said his job consumes him.

' He was wrestling around the other night and I woke him up, ' she said. ' I asked, 'Are you having a nightmare?' He said, 'No, but I'm in the middle of my second surgery tomorrow.'

For all the accolades this doctor has received for his work over the years, perhaps his crowning achievement in the medical field is a nonprofit organization he and Ginger started in 1993.

As part of Face the Challenge, doctors in the United States are sent to foreign countries to provide free life-enhancing facial surgeries for severely deformed children. Ginger, a registered nurse, runs the organization out of the couple's Aurora home.

Randy Robinson is modest but proud of the organization's success and the doctors who come from as far away as Massachusetts to do the free work. Twenty-four trips have been made, with Robinson going along twice a year.

Teams work 14 hours or more a day, bringing in as many children as possible. A mission in Vietnam next month already has 100 people signed up for surgery.

Robinson estimated that at least 350 children - from places such as Bolivia, China and Vietnam - have received facial surgeries from the organization.

The children operated on often are the forgotten ones scarred far beyond their physical appearances. They carry emotional wounds from people who cast them away as freaks who deserve their fate because their families are cursed for misdeeds.

" The kids would have no chance to live a normal life if doctors didn't give themselves up to do this," said Dr. Rennie Crane, a maxillofacial surgeon from Danville, Pa., who met **Robinson** in 1998 and immediately began traveling with the missionary organization. " At the least, we're making the children more socially acceptable. The work **Randy** has been able to accomplish is amazing. "

People with cleft lips and pallets are common among those who line up for the surgeries. Some are without noses. Several Vietnamese children are victims of land mines left behind decades ago.

Robinson remembers one particular case when a Vietnamese mother saw her repaired son's face shortly after surgery.

" She held the boy and began singing a Vietnamese lullaby," **Robinson** said. "Tears were streaming down her face and were going on her child.

" At that moment, you realized that you've changed the lives of an entire family." Those outside the medical field said **Robinson** has left a profound mark on their lives.

For more information, visit www.parkmeadowscosmeticsurgery.com

" He's everything you want someone to be," said Ed Christine, managing editor of the Danville News, who traveled to China with **Robinson**, Crane and other doctors last year to chronicle the medical-missionary work.

" At first you're skeptical that the guy's going to be that great," Christine said. " You meet him once and you realize it's all true."

Raised in Kansas and Missouri, **Robinson** always knew he wanted to be a doctor. He dedicated his life to Jesus in high school, won Junior Olympics' weight-lifting medals and went to the University of Missouri in Columbia to study biology. He met his future wife during the third week of school there.

" **Randy's** spiritual beliefs motivate him in everything he does," Ginger Robinson said. " When I first saw him I knew that he was probably the neatest person I'd ever meet in my life."

The pair married several years later and Ginger worked as a nurse while **Randy** studied medicine for nearly a decade at the University of Missouri in Kansas City. They moved to France when Randy earned a fellowship.

While in France, **Robinson** became interested in distractionosteogenesis - Latin for bone lengthening. He began thinking of a device to correct unusually short jawbones.

Ginger and **Randy** moved to Colorado, where he worked on his project.

He would break the jaw, insert screws to hold the bone together and expand the bone with the screws over a period of several weeks. New bone would grow over the screws and lengthen the jaw.

He called it - " The Bone Generator."

In 1993, the device was patented and the Food and Drug Administration later approved it. " It was great to know that I had something to show for my work," **Robinson** said.

In 1998, then-15-year-old Jackie Schmieding became the first to undergo the procedure. Battling the taunts of children since she was in elementary school, Schmieding learned that her jaw would never develop fully unless surgery was done.

Five doctors were consulted. Jackie's family chose **Robinson**.

" From the moment he walked in the door, I felt at peace," Jackie, now a ThunderRidge High School senior, said of their first meeting.

Two weeks after the surgery, Schmieding's jaw grew 15 millimeters. She felt confident with herself.

" She now flirts with the best of them," **Robinson** joked.

The youngest patient to undergo jaw-lengthening surgery was 3 months old, while the oldest was 50. All have been successful.

So grateful was Schmieding that she raised \$30,000 in donations for **Robinson's** missionary organization. She even traveled with the group when it went to China in September.

"It's incredible to see the job that all these doctors are doing," said Schmieding, who will attend the University of Northern Colorado and plans to major in education. " I'm just glad I could help."

The organization has raised about \$900,000 in the past seven years, Ginger Robinson said. **Randy** contends that they can get by on \$150,000 a year in donations, and plans right now are geared toward keeping the traveling groups small.

This month, Ginger Robinson sent a 70-page "How To" guide to the American Association of Maxillofacial Surgeons in Chicago. The guide gives information on how to start a medical missionary group and how to coordinate volunteers.

The idea will take off among others in the medical profession, **Randy Robinson** said.

" As a doctor, you get into medicine to do meaningful things so that people can have a better life," he said. " I'd like to think that everyone's looking to do that."