

SA electrician to light up Sierra Leone

Renier Marx will trade 18 years of profitable business in electrical engineering in Africa's largest economy, South Africa, to become a non-salaried volunteer in one of the continent's poorest nations, Sierra Leone.



The Modjadijeskloof (Limpopo) resident, who has been installing generators, power factor correction units panel wiring, pump installations, solar installations, and house wiring as an electrical contractor in Limpopo and Bloemfontein since 1996, leaves next week to become chief electrician onboard the world's largest non-governmental hospital ship, the *Africa Mercy*, currently docked in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

"The life-changing experience of the patients' really drew us into this calling as it is something extremely unique and meaningful," Marx says about his family's decision to join the international medical charity, Mercy Ships. Although proceeds from his business paid the bills, Marx says he could not get away from the deep longing "to be part of something (more) meaningful."

This search for significance resulted in the Marx family learning about Mercy Ships and Marx volunteering onboard the *Africa Mercy* while she was in shipyard in South Africa last year. Following a successful shipyard phase in Durban, Marx sailed with the ship to Sierra Leone, helping ensure that the electrical systems were in good working order.

Progress, but still facing challenges



Sierra Leone has made significant efforts to address local health care concerns, but still faces challenges including high infant mortality. In response to an invitation from the president of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma, for strategic partnership in the country's current five-year health care plan, Mercy Ships returned to the West African nation for the fifth time in almost two decades. Since arriving at the end of February this year, teams from the *Africa Mercy* have already provided:

- 505 specialised surgeries
- 8758 dental procedures for 2675 people and basic oral health education for 2405
- 1979 eye evaluations and treatments and 889 refraction/eye exams
- 2 clinicians have received surgical mentoring

- 18 trainees in orthopaedic Ponseti casting while providing services for 40 patients and 791 physical therapy services
- 45 health care professionals, 16 mental health staff and 22 church leaders have received training in mental health evaluation, treatment or counselling
- Anaesthesia conference hosted 79 participants to exchange ideas and learn current developments in anaesthesia
- A midwife conference hosted 28 participants to exchange ideas and receive training
- 225 church and community leaders from the Bo area participated in a development conference that explores ideas for community development.

Ongoing project

Some of the services and training tied to the presence of the ship will continue until the hospital ship departs in December of this year. Mercy Ships collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, health development partners and leadership at strategic hospitals in Sierra Leone to improve services will continue on a multi-year framework thereafter.

Marx is excited about being joined by his family in volunteering with Mercy Ships for as long as possible. His three children will continue their education at the onboard, accredited academy, and his wife, Evilin, a professional nurse, will be primary caregiver to their three children as well as volunteer in the hospital onboard when time permits.

Marx is excited about being joined by his family in volunteering with Mercy Ships for as long as possible. "My work for God is the ultimate. He is the Creator of everyone and everything. There can never be a better job to work for than Him."

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