

SIGHTED ON TURTLE ISLAND

WHEN DR. JEROLD E. BEEVE, a Glendale, Calif., eye surgeon, and his wife, Dorothy, were vacationing on Turtle Island in the South Pacific in 1989, they were struck by something odd: people there and on neighboring islands in Fiji didn't wear eyeglasses or sunglasses. They soon realized why: doctors and glasses were not readily available. The Beeves suspected the sun's potent glare caused declining vision in the inhabitants, many of whom become blind.

Dr. Beeve wanted to change all that. So in 1991 he founded a free eye clinic on Turtle Island.

Each year since then, the Beeves have returned with Newport Beach, Calif., anesthesiologist Dr. Stephen Skahen and his wife, Sandy, to spend two weeks at the clinic caring for thousands of people there and on surrounding islands. Other medical personnel have also volunteered their services at the clinic.

They work up to 16 hours a day in tropical heat, taking no time for island delights. Dr. Beeve explains: "We see people who've been sitting in the hot sun just to meet with us. So you tell yourself, 'Okay, one more.' And then you see someone else, and you think, 'Okay, one more.'"

Since it opened, the clinic has tested the vision of over 6000 people, handed out more than 5900 pairs of glasses and performed 372 operations.

Among the patients was a woman who had been blind for seven years. She had a cataract removed from one of her eyes. A young boy was with the woman when the bandages were taken off. She gently framed his face with her hands, her smile now replaced by tears.

It was her grandson. She was seeing him for the first time.

—Marilyn Beck