

*Liga International, Inc.*  
*Central San Joaquin Chapter*  
*“The Flying Doctors of Mercy”*

Since 1934, Liga International, Inc., a philanthropic organization, has provided medical, dental and eye care to impoverished people in rural Mexico. In the 1930's, Dr. Iner Ritchie, the founding member of Liga, traveled by horseback throughout Mexico on a volunteer basis to treat people who lived in rural areas. After World War II, small aircraft became available, and physicians who were also trained as pilots during the war began to fly to remote areas in the sates of Sonora, Sinaloa and Baja, California. At that time, Liga, which means “league”, became known as “The Flying Doctors of Mercy”.

In 1991, the Central San Joaquin Chapter, with headquarters in Fresno, was formally formed under the guidance of the Dr. Frank Cantrell. Over the years Dr. Frank Cantrell, Dr. Michael Lynch, Sandra Lee, PA, Dr. Charles Touton, Gordon Knott and Bob Stroup have filled the presidency. Karen L. Lynch is our current president.

The Fresno Chapter has adopted Ocoroni as a sister city. The North Fresno, East and Fig Garden Rotaries, the Garabedian Foundation, and our chapter worked together to build our medical clinic in 1996.

Due to weather constraints during the summer months, we are only able to provide free medical care from October through June. Each month physicians, pilots, nurses, interpreters, Rotarians, pharmacists, dentists and those who simple want to lend a hand, fly to the clinic to provide free healthcare that serves between 200-300 people. The clinic is held on Saturday and it provides services and health education to families who have little or no access to medical care. Some of the individuals treated have never previously received any form of medical care. Over 50% of the patients are children.

Liga has been successful because of the generosity of interested individuals and the high level of enthusiasm among its volunteers. Being bilingual or having a medical background is not necessary to help our organization either at the clinic in Mexico or locally. Throughout the year, Liga volunteers meet once a month to discuss important issues to help improve the efficiency and quality of our services, to increase volunteer participation and fundraising planning.

In addition to our chapter, there is another chapter based in Southern California servicing other cities in the state of Sonora: i.e., El Fuerte, San Blas and El Carrizo. The general and medical communities in Mexico closely support each Liga chapter.

Liga also provides a great opportunity for American medical students, interns, and residents to enhance their medical education. We see many diseases in Mexico that are seldom seen here in the U.S.

The needs of the families in Ocoroni and its surrounding communities are many. All financial contributions obtained by the Fresno Chapter go to the Ocoroni clinic. The funding to help the Ocoroni clinic is sparse. Currently funds are being sought for two major capital investments at the clinic. The first is a water purification system and the second is to outfit an operating room. Our immediate goal is to raise the necessary funds to equip a dental room at the clinic. Currently only very minor 'office' surgery is being done. There is a need for a formal operating facility for more extensive cases which will be our goal for the future.

Volunteers are always needed to participate on our monthly trips but for those individuals who are unable to fly to Mexico, there is always something you can do to help. We are always looking for help with fundraising, coordinating trip participation and most importantly promoting Liga's mission.

Other donations we seek are medical supplies, vitamins, medications and also to sponsor our volunteers who cannot afford the travel costs involved when flying to Mexico for the weekend. The approximate cost to sponsor a volunteer is \$300 which covers fuel, food and lodging for the three-day clinic trip. Some funds are available to those individuals who would otherwise not be able to participate in the trip. We are always looking for donations that would contribute to our volunteer sponsorship fund.

Liga International, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization. All funds go to the local Central San Joaquin Chapter for the clinic in Ocoroni, Mexico. Liga has no paid employees and is entirely made up of volunteers.