

## **Flying doctors put poor on route to better health**

**Over 250 Oasis residents to get medical care**

By *MARK ARMSTRONG*

**THE DESERT SUN** May 16, 1999

OASIS -They flew into Thermal Airport this weekend purely for their love of aviation, but a group of altruistic doctors known as "Los Medicos Voladores" - or the Flying Doctors - also provided some much-needed medical attention to local families who have nowhere else to turn.

More than 250 people were expected to receive medical attention from the volunteer doctors at Oasis School throughout the weekend, in a program sponsored by groups including the Eisenhower Diabetes Program, Santa Rosa del Valle Medical Group and John F. Kennedy Memorial Hospital.

And the group of Northern California-based doctors had their hands full. Families on Saturday lined up for services such as physical exams for children, basic dental work, diabetes screenings and general medical attention.

Organizers said many families are in a tough position - ineligible to receive help from state health-care provider MediCal, yet too poor to pay for basic medical services on their own.

"(For many of them) there's no medical service at all," said Gloria Arias, an Oasis School staff member and clinic volunteer.

"A lot of our kids don't get dental work, and it's hard to get them in to the doctors."

In one portable classroom, 8- year-old Brenda Garcia sat attentively - her mouth pried open and eyes staring into the light - while, dentist Mark Lieberman worked on filling a cavity. Her mother, Thermal resident Juana Garcia, watched her daughter from just a few feet away. She said Saturday's clinic was helpful in getting her four children the medical attention she could not provide. "This is very good," Garcia said in Spanish, "because we would not be able to pay for a dentist."

**WAITING LIST:** Organizers said the waiting list is the longest for dental assistance, because many times dental work is treated almost as a luxury when families most struggle to make ends meet. Lieberman saw 29 patients on Friday and expected to see about that many Saturday.

"I like to combine flying airplanes and doing community service such as this," he said. "There's plenty of people in the United States who need this help. They don't have access to this care anywhere else."

This weekend's trip to the Coachella Valley marked the 57th flying mission for Dr. David Morgan, a practitioner from Los Gatos who, on Saturday, provided advice for local residents who came to him complaining of ailments.

Morgan has been with the Flying Doctors since the group began in 1974, and he said the majority of their trips have been to areas throughout Mexico.

**FOCUS:** But doctors say they have received less cooperation from the Mexican government lately, and they have begun to focus efforts on underprivileged areas within California.

Morgan said - the group may look to start returning to the valley every six months to provide free treatment. "Up to 20 percent of the people here have no medical care," Morgan said. "It's something we do because of the need, and the people. We just do what we can."



**Open up:** Dr. Mark Leiberman of Sunnyvale gives an injection to Brenda Garcia, 8, on Saturday.



**Checkup:** Dr. David Morgan of Los Gatos, one of the Flying Doctors, exams Barbara Cabrea of Oasis.