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The Founder

Dr. Ingida Asfaw

As a teenager, in the fall of 1958, Dr. Ingida Asfaw traveled two and a half weeks from Ethiopia to America aboard a cargo ship with little money, a small suitcase and a big dream — to become a doctor and return to Ethiopia with healing hands. He has achieved his dream against extraordinary odds, but he has never forgotten his homeland and the needs of so many of its impoverished and suffering citizens.

Today, a half-century later, Dr. Asfaw has kept true to his vision by becoming a world-renowned cardiac surgeon. He created the Ethiopian North American Health Professionals Association (ENAHPA), an international network of nearly 1,000 medical and non-medical professionals dedicated to promoting preventative care and better health in Ethiopia.

Since 2001, Dr. Asfaw has led ENAHPA on nine medical missions in efforts to address his homeland's "profound healthcare crisis." A brilliant surgeon, but humble man, Dr. Asfaw leads volunteers from the health profession into Ethiopia on semiannual medical missions. During a recent mission, ENAHPA's delegation performed 203 free medical/surgical procedures; conducted advanced training for 500 Ethiopian healthcare professionals; donated 45,000 books; and provided lifesaving medical equipment, instruments and supplies to several hospitals, three universities and the All African Leprosy Education Research Training (ALERT) Hospital. During the October 2004 mission, Dr. Asfaw garnered support from several grassroots charities to launch Ethiopia's first major distribution of free antiretroviral drugs. The free Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) program serves 10,000 patients and is Eastern Africa's model for delivering home-based HIV/AIDS care and treatment.

In 2006, Volvo Cars of North America recognized Dr. Asfaw as "American's Greatest Hometown Hero"

for his contributions to Ethiopia as well as those in his local community. The Wayne County Medical Society awarded Dr. Asfaw its 2007 “Public Servant of the Year,” and his alma mater, Eastern Mennonite University, named Dr. Asfaw as its “2007 Alumnus of the Year.”

As a venerated cardiac surgeon, he has given an enormous amount to his field of specialty. Along with his practicing partner, Dr. Asfaw pioneered the lifesaving tricuspid valve surgery, a procedure that is used throughout the world. As a professor, he spends time training and educating medical students, residents and fellows at Wayne State University, Detroit Medical Center and St. Joseph Mercy Oakland (member of Trinity Health).

Dr. Asfaw has served as president of the Michigan Society of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgeons, CEO of Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgeons of Michigan, chairman of cardiothoracic surgery at St. Joseph Mercy Oakland and is currently chief of cardiovascular surgery at Sinai-Grace Hospital in Detroit, Michigan.

“Together, we can make a difference.”