



Humanitarian Award

Edward "Ted" Higgins, Jr., MD '78

Edward "Ted" Higgins, Jr., MD '78, is a vascular surgeon who has dedicated his life to providing top-tier surgical care to patients around the world, principally in Haiti through the Higgins Brothers Surgicenter for Hope, which he established in Fonds-Parisien, Haiti, in 2016.

A graduate of St. Lawrence University, Dr. Higgins earned his degree in government while competing for the university's football, ski, and tennis teams. He attended medical school at Upstate Medical University, completed a general surgery residency at Yale-New Haven Medical Center, followed by a vascular surgical fellowship at Baylor College of Medicine.

It was during Higgins' fourth year of surgical residency that he and his wife, Kim, first experienced Haiti during a three-month rotation he did at Hôpital Albert Schweitzer in DesChapelles, Haiti. The Higgins were touched by the Haitian people, their culture, and their needs, and were inspired by the physicians who devoted their lives to transformative work in healthcare, local economies, and access to water.

Board certified in both general surgery and vascular surgery, Higgins and his wife settled in her hometown of Kansas City, where he helped

start a busy general and vascular surgical practice.

Through his church, Higgins began annual trips to the Dominican Republic to provide healthcare to sugar cane cutters and their families. Seeing surgical needs of all kinds, he began operating in a borrowed clinic in 1992, training Dominican surgeons to perform both laparoscopic abdominal procedures as well as vascular access procedures for patients with end stage renal disease.

Following a catastrophic earthquake in 2010, Higgins returned to Haiti with mission teams to help with surgical cases in the region.



Dr. Higgins operating in Haiti

Because of the lack of surgical care in Haiti, patients travelled from afar when mission teams were present. During annual week-long trips to Fonds-Parisien over the next six years, he performed more than 500 surgeries, over time recognizing the need for more surgical operating space and trained local surgeons to handle the demand.

In 2016, the Higgins Brothers Surgicenter for Hope was opened with a goal to provide surgical access in an area of Haiti with no surgical options, and to help train surgical residents from the General Hospital in Port-Au-Prince. With construction funded by Higgins, the facility is named in honor of Higgins father, Edward Higgins, MD, who was an Upstate ENT resident from 1946 to 1950, and his uncle, Paul Higgins, MD, a general surgeon, who practiced together for 38 years in Cortland, New York.

Within three years, the Surgicenter employed an all-Haitian staff of 25, including two general surgeons, two OB-GYN surgeons, two anesthesiologists, two emergency room doctors, and four nurse midwives, performing an average of 600 operations and delivering more than 500 babies annually, all at a sliding fee based on what the patient can afford, which in some cases is nothing.



The Higgins family, left to right: wife Kim; daughter Helen; granddaughter Molly; daughter Becca; Higgins; daughter Maggie, MD; granddaughter Poppy, Dr. Jack Shuler (husband of Maggie); son Eddie and his wife Westy; and granddaughter Sophie

In 2020, Higgins retired from his own surgical practice to focus on teaching the Haitian surgeons vascular surgery. At the same time, the Higgins Brothers Surgicenter for Hope inherited a failing medical clinic that was preparing to close. Over the year, the medical staff was reorganized, a medical pavilion clinic area was constructed on campus, and the medical, pediatric, obstetric, gynecological, HIV, surgical and dental clinics saw 1,600 patients in 2021.

That August, a massive earthquake again affected the southern peninsula of Haiti, creating huge destruction and causing more than 3,000 deaths. Higgins joined a team from his Surgicenter to provide care for earthquake victims, traveling over the mountains on a “goat road” to avoid gangs controlling the main roads.

Despite political upheaval, lack of a functioning government, and widespread gang violence, the

Surgicenter continues its operations with a current staff of 83 employees that provide the only 24/7 emergency and trauma facility in the region. Higgins visits four times a year, although he currently does not bring medical students, residents, or other volunteers due to ongoing threat of violence. Since opening in 2016, the Surgicenter has tripled in size. Up the hill, a new medical staff living facility will soon be dedicated, which will prevent the dangerous road travel for healthcare providers living in Port-Au-Prince. Construction has also begun on a new two-floor maternity center. In addition, the Surgicenter supports a local orphanage school and the development of a river diversion project to prevent flooding during the rain season.

But Higgins’ humanitarian efforts are not limited to Haiti. During his busy surgical career, he volunteered giving surgical consults

at the Kansas City Free Clinic. He also helped establish the Research Rough Riders, a bicycle team that has raised more than \$1 million for multiple sclerosis research, becoming the third largest private fund for MS research in the United States. Regularly listed among “best doctors” in Kansas City, Higgins has received honors from the Kansas City Medical Society, Kansas City Surgical Society, Research Medical Center, and several magazines and newspapers for his quality service and surgical expertise. In 2022, he was honored with St. Lawrence University’s Humanitarian Award. He and Kim enjoy their four adult children, Eddie, Maggie, Becca, and Helen, and three granddaughters.