# AECPight

2021 SUMMER NEWSLETTER

### THE WAR AND OUR RESPONSE

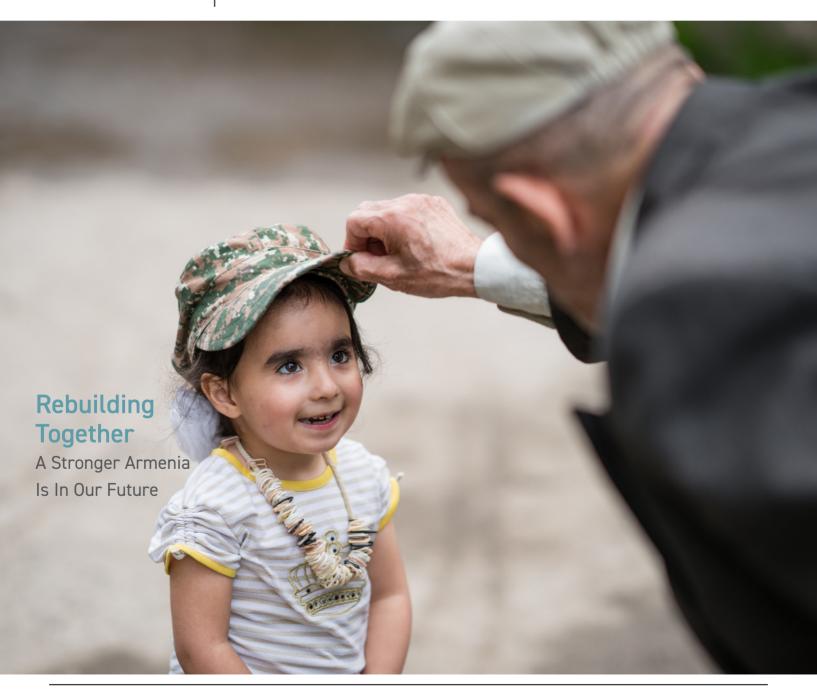
An attack on Artsakh rocks the Armenian community. We respond with emergency and ongoing aid. p.4

### FIVE CENTERS IN FIVE YEARS

Our new Regional Eye Center in Yeghegnadzor opens, marking five regional centers in Armenia in five years. p.8

### **THE LEGACY OF SIGHT**

Two modest men give generous bequests and allow our sight-saving programs to continue for generations to come. p.13







### THE ARMENIAN EYECARE PROJECT

### Founder and President

Roger V. Ohanesian, MD

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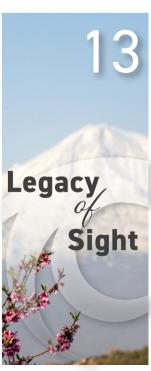
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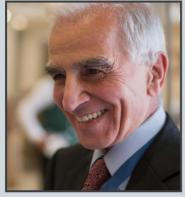






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# A Message from Our Founder



# TO OUR AECP FAMILY: THANK YOU!

Dear AECP supporters and friends,

The year 2020 will be considered one of the most trying times for people in history. As a global pandemic raged on, another tragedy hit Armenia in particular: an attack on Artsakh and later a war leading to thousands of deaths, countless injuries and displaced families seeking refuge.

Despite the immense challenges of the past year you — our dedicated community of supporters and friends — rose to the occasion and touched us with your willingness to help.

Because of your support, the Armenian EyeCare Project was able to organize both emergency relief efforts and ongoing relief programs to meet the increased needs for vision care in post-war Armenia.

This has included urgent treatment for wounded soldiers and civilians during and immediately following the war; the launch of our Vision Referral Program to most efficiently care for those injured and the expansion of our Low Vision Center to offer aid to the increased number of Armenians with vision loss. You can find the details of these developments, and many more updates from our organization, in the pages ahead.

For now, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to you — our AECP family — for making all this possible. As we work to fulfill Armenia's heightened eye care needs and continue our mission, I realize this progress would be impossible without your help. There is still much to do but I am confident we can reach Armenia's full potential with you by our side. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do for Armenia.

With immense gratitude,

Roger Ohavesian mo

Roger V. Ohanesian MD

Founder and President

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**Alcon Gives In-Kind** 

Alcon donates essential medical equipment to AECP

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### ON SEPTEMBER 27, 2020 powerful explosions rocked Artsakh, an ethnic enclave home to hundreds of thousands of Armenians. Azerbaiian had beaun attacks across the region, targeting and destroying businesses, homes, schools, hospitals, historic monuments and other critical infrastructure. As a result more than half of the civilian population of Artsakh mostly women, children and the elderly - were displaced as they fled for safety. Over 5,000 Armenian soldiers were killed and countless were wounded

### **Emergency Relief Efforts**

Since the first day of the war, the Armenian EyeCare Project (AECP) has been providing aid to alleviate the pain and suffering for the thousands of Armenians affected. With resounding support from our donors and unwavering commitment from our doctors and staff, our organization has been able to offer a coordinated response in this emergency, utilizina established infrastructure. equipped clinics and trained medical staff.

Dr. Asatur Hovsepyan, AECP's Chief Surgeon, was among the first physicians to respond to the need for a skilled eye surgeon and volunteered to work in the makeshift military hospital in Artsakh. Working aboard the AECP's Mobile Eye Hospital for the past 20 years. Dr. Hovsepyan has gained extensive surgical experience that was invaluable on the front lines. But even with these skills, he admitted that the injuries sustained in this recent war are severe and previously unseen due to new-age weapons, including cluster bombs, which cause terminal damage to the eyes.

During his time in Artsakh,

# **2020 TIMELINE**

# Sept. 27

### ATTACK ON ARTSAKH

ground attacks on Artsakh, targeting

## Sept. 28

### EMERGENCY CARE IN CLINICS

AN INFLUX OF WOUNDED

Malayan Ophthalmological Center in Yerevan for emergency care. The facility's Trauma Department gets transformed into a fullfledged military hospital as physicians, including AECP Fellows, work nonstop to treat the injured.

Artsakh. Items include food, water,

clothes, blankets, over-the-counter

AID PACKAGES

### Oct. 12-17

### MEDICAL AID FOR SOLDIERS

AECP Chief Surgeon Asatur Hovsepvan arrives in Artsakh

### TO SOLDIERS AND REFUGEES AECP distributes its first care

Oct. 15-30

### EYE SCREENINGS FOR REFUGEES

AECP organizes eye screenings for refugee families including children aboard our Mobile Eye Hospital. such as surgery, laser treatment or it - all at no cost.

# Nov. & 0

### CONTINUING EFFORT **SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT** TO FACILITIES

supplies and equipment to medical care facilities across Armenia.

Dr. Hovsepyan saw up to 50 soldiers a day and treated injuries ranging from pieces of shrapnel in soldiers' eves to aluminum-like particles undetectable on X-ray to more severe cases where eyes were irreversibly damaged due to explosions and drone strikes.

"Doctors and patients were crammed in one room of the hospital, which was in a safe zone because the main hospital was being targeted by Azeri missiles." Hovsepyan said. "At times, a team of doctors worked on one patient as many areas of the body needed care. Every doctor was doing their best to save as many lives as possible."

In some cases, Dr. Hovsepyan

had to perform emergency surgery using what basic equipment was available. conditions. Despite the surgeries went well and patients could then be transported to the Malayan Ophthalmological Center in Yerevan for follow-up care. There, the Center's Trauma Department had become a military hospital and staff worked nonstop to ensure

wounded soldiers received immediate attention.

Two AECP Fellows. Dr. Gharakeshishyan, **Armine** Head of the Neuro-Orbital Department, and Dr. Georgi Grigoryan, Head of the Trauma Department helped provide urgent eye and face reconstruction for the injured soldiers. "We were working around the clock to provide immediate care to our soldiers as any delay could result in the need for a prosthesis at a later stage." Dr. Gharakeshisyan said.

### **Ongoing Relief Efforts**

addition to treating immediate eye trauma, the AECP also quickly realized that many soldiers wounded in the war would need longterm, follow-up care to recover their sight, including orbital implants and ongoing assistance at our Low Vision Center. With this in mind - and through the generous support of Operation Armenia by UCLA - we launched a Vision Referral Program, facilitating the highest quality eye care connecting specialists in Armenia and abroad to discuss cases and offer the best treatment solutions.

Well-known in Armenia's medical community as a consistent supporter, the AECP also received many requests for aid from medical facilities in the country so they too could address the urgent needs of wounded Armenians. Thanks to our efforts. hundreds ophthalmic of equipment, surgical supplies and eye implants were donated to eve clinics across Armenia. We also played a key role in coordinating donations of much-needed medical equipment outside of eye care, from supplies for abdominal surgeries to ear, nose, throat and dental tools. as well as equipment for clinics both in Armenia and Artsakh

addition medical to outreach, since the start of the war, our staff has worked tirelessly to offer further where needed. support Several shipments of first aid medications, warm clothes and other necessities were delivered to soldiers and given to refugees. Women, children and the elderly from displaced Artsakh have received food, clothes, blankets and more. As well. refugees have received eye exams on our Mobile Eye Hospital and follow-up care like surgeries, laser treatment and eyeglasses when needed - all at no cost.

#### **Continuation of Care**

Despite challenges from the pandemic and war, we were also able to follow through with our plans for 2020 and uphold our promise to continue to offer quality eye care in Armenia. Our fifth Regional Eye Center, located in Yeghegnadzor, welcomed its first patients in October. As well, we were able to hold our 18th International Conference, virtually for the first time, advancing medical education, the cornerstone of our programs.

It is symbolic that decades after the first war in Artsakh, the AECP — which was born out of the crisis in 1992 when Armenia's healthcare system was initially overwhelmed with the wounded - was standing next to Armenians once again in times of trouble. Like all Armenians around the world, we, the collective AECP, with our physicians, staff and dedicated donors. were heartbroken and driven to help. And as we joined our efforts to provide critical assistance for this conflict. securing aid, medication and supplies to those affected by the war, we were humbled and overwhelmed with gratitude for all the support received from our faithful friends and supporters. Because of you, we have been able to keep our promise to Armenia and bring sight to Armenian eyes even during the most trying of times





# LAUNCH OF VISION REFERRAL PROGRAM

Following the recent Artsakh War the need for vision care in Armenia has increased due to injuries sustained by soldiers and civilians. To effectively address this increased need for care, the AECP has established a Vision Referral Program.

For nearly 30 years our organization has provided eye care to hundreds of thousands of Armenians in need. Following the recent Artsakh War in September, the need for vision care in Armenia has drastically increased due to injuries sustained from blast burns, explosion debris and other damage-causing substances. The majority of those affected have been soldiers though civilians have been hurt as well.

To continue fulfilling Armenia's vision care needs, the AECP has established a Vision Referral Program to effectively and promptly address requests submitted by people and/or organizations on behalf of an injured person or by the injured person themselves. By broadening the referral process and utilizing social

media and other communication avenues to identify injured Armenians in need of care, the AECP will be able to more promptly and efficiently provide the required treatment and rehabilitation for these injured Armenians.

The goal of our Vision Referral Program is to facilitate the best possible eye care for those who have sustained optical injuries during the war by connecting them with specialists in Armenia for clinical evaluation (firsttime assessment or second opinion) and determining their best treatment options. These treatments may take place in Armenia or abroad, as appropriate and determined by the specialist in Armenia in consultation with specialists outside of Armenia when needed.

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# ENHANCEMENT OF LOW VISION CENTER IN ARMENIA

THE RECENT ARTSAKH War has had many disastrous repercussions for Armenia. One of them is the rise of visually impaired people in the country, both soldiers and civilians. Since last November, our Low Vision Center has seen a dramatic increase in the number of patients with ocular damage from explosions and other injuries sustained during the war. Caused by heavy munition blasts, the ocular trauma is both dire and complex, often leaving patients with little to no vision at all. Those considered lucky to have avoided complete blindness need access to regular low vision services to maintain what remains of their sight.

The AECP's Low Vision Center, located at the Kanaker-Zeytun Medical Center in Yerevan, has recently ramped up its services by obtaining additional equipment, including specialized optical and non-optical devices, to continue helping an increased number of patients. In addition to the updated equipment, in partnership with a group



A patient being seen at the AECP Low Vision Center in Yerevan

low vision continue to live productive lives despite their loss of sight.

Directed by Dr. Ani Gevorgyan, the Low Vision Center has

and life skills like specialized computer programs for the visually impaired. Low vision can hamper daily activities like reading and driving but it is not the same as blindness since there is still some vision in the eye that may be improved with the use of special devices and lifestyle aids.

The AECP's Low Vision Center currently treats over 7,000 patients a year but we expect that number to rise in the next few years as wounded soldiers with eye trauma require low vision services, prosthetic eye replacements and search for new possibilities to partially restore their sight.

The Low Vision
Center established
by AECP in 2006 is
undergoing major
enhancements to
continue meeting
the growing needs
of the population
including soldiers
and civilians
wounded in the
recent Artsakh War.

# LOW VISION CARE OFFERS HOPE FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

of Boston-based low vision professors, the AECP is also organizing a series of online training sessions for local low vision specialists and occupational therapists to help them master new techniques in the field of low vision. These services and tools, such as vocational and life skills training, ensure that patients suffering from

been treating individuals who experience loss of sight, which cannot be corrected with eyeglasses, contact lenses, medication or surgery, since 2006.

The only clinic of its kind in the Caucasus, the Low Vision Center works with patients who suffer from impaired sight and teaches them vocational

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Our Regional
Eye Centers
program
was created
to enhance
sustainable
access to quality
eye care for the
population in the
various regions
of Armenia

LOCATED IN THE CITY of Yeghegnadzor in the Vayots Dzor province of Armenia, the Vahakn Aglamishian AECP Regional Eye Center was opened October 2020, accepting its first patients and making quality eye care more accessible to the thousands of Armenians living in the region.

We began our initiative to develop Regional Eye Centers throughout Armenia in 2015 when we launched our Five-for-Five campaign – developing five Regional Eye Centers for \$5 million in five years. The eye clinics would be established in regions throughout Armenia where they were needed most based on population and need of care.

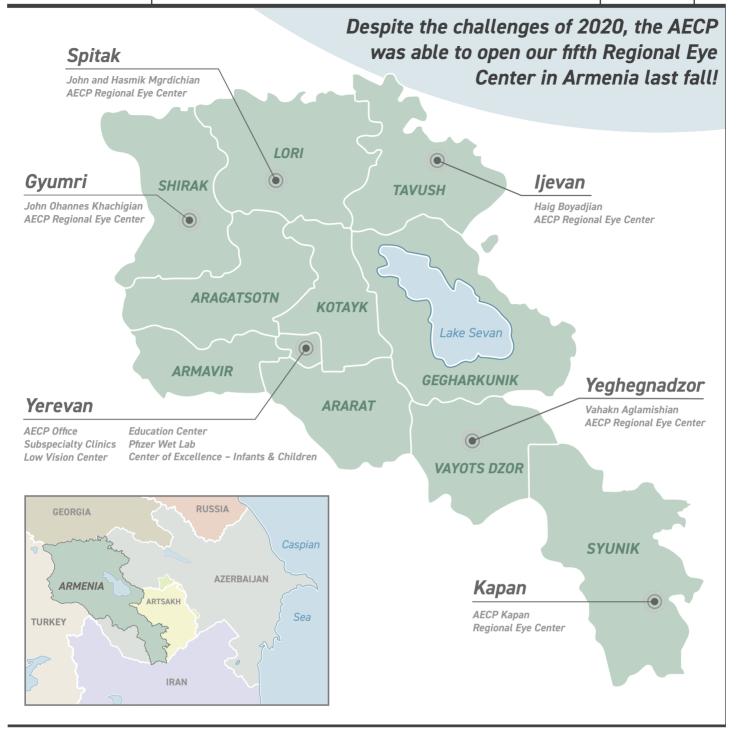
The first clinic, the Haig Boyadjian AECP Regional Eye Center, was opened in Ijevan (Tavush province) in 2015; the second, the John and Hasmik Mgrdichian AECP Regional Eye Center was opened in Spitak (Lori province) in 2016; the third,



the AECP Kapan Regional Eye Center was opened in Kapan (Syunik province) in 2017 and the fourth, the John Ohannes Khachigian AECP Regional Eye Center, was opened in Gyumri (Shirak province) in 2018.

With the fifth clinic – the Vahakn Aglamishian AECP Regional Eye Center – now open in Yeghegnadzor, we are thrilled we were able to

keep our promise to Armenia and develop five Regional Eye Centers in five years – bringing eye care to hundreds of thousands of Armenians across the country who otherwise would not have quick and easy access to this care. It is a milestone we were unsure we could accomplish due to the coronavirus and recent unrest in the region, but we worked through these challenges in the name of



bringing eye care to the many Armenians who were counting on us for care.

"The Regional Eye Centers program was created to enhance sustainable access to quality eye care for the population in the regions of Armenia and to revitalize the regional eye care system through the establishment and continuous operation of secondary level eye centers in five regions throughout the country," AECP Country Director Nune Yeghiazaryan said. "Through the years,

these clinics – furnished with the most up-to-date medical equipment – provide free eye care services to the socially vulnerable and also offer paid services to those who can afford treatment thus securing larger access for patients and sustainability of the centers."

Governor of Armenia's Vayots Dzor province, Mr. Ararat Grigoryan, praised the AECP's initiative to establish an ophthalmological center in the Vayots Dzor province and to train local medical

staff in the region to provide high-quality eye care services to the region's population. Most recently, Chief Surgeon and Medical Director of the AECP's Mobile Eye Hospital, Dr. Asatur Hovsepyan, visited the Yeghegnadzor clinic to train and discuss cases with ophthalmologist Dr. Iveta Shirinyan. Our AECPtrained physicians continue to train local doctors and medical staff in the regions to ensure that the highest quality of medical services is being provided in the regional centers.

We are thrilled at this great accomplishment of opening our fifth Regional Eye Center Armenia and marking culmination of the our ambitious project. Because of our Regional Eye Centers, accessibility to eye care is no longer a challenge to the hundreds of thousands of Armenians living in the many regions throughout Armenia and we are closer at fulfilling our mission to provide quality eye care to every child and adult in the country.

# **ELINAR'S STORY**

"Now my daughter can see much better," Elinar's mother said. "Due to her poor vision Elinar was experiencing some difficulties at school but after her surgery she studies much better. I am so thankful to the AECP for providing this support!"



Elinar (right) pictured here with her mother and baby brother

ELINAR IS ONLY seven vears old but she has already experienced the horror of war. The morning of September 27, 2020 Elinar woke up to the sound of bombs going off near her home. Missile attacks from Azerbaijan were targeting peaceful settlements in Artsakh, where Elinar and her family lived. Within a few hours Elinar, alongside her mother and three siblings, were heading to Armenia to

seek refuge. The war forced them to leave their native village of Getavan while Elinar's father stayed back to protect their homeland.

Due to the stress Elinar began having nightmares and needed support from a therapist. During one of her visits the psychologist noticed that Elinar had a problem with her eyes. The family said Elinar's vision had begun to deteriorate about a

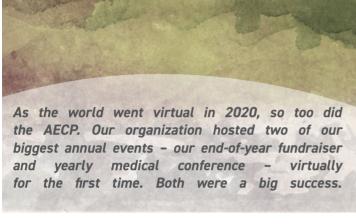
year ago but that they could not afford the care needed to fix her sight.

Familiar with the Armenian EyeCare Project and our many programs in Armenia the psychologist referred Elinar's family organization. During Elinar's eye exam, AECP Physician Dr. Ruzanna Harutyunyan identified a congenital cataract in the girl's right eye. Such cases require surgery at an early age to save the child's vision. In Elinar's case this precious time would be irreversibly lost if not for the support of the AECP. The staff at our Armenia office helped Elinar's family with the required paperwork and Elinar was able to receive her much-needed surgery and was also given highquality intraocular lenses all at no cost.

cataract surgery Elinar's vision has improved exponentially. "Now my daughter can see much better," Elinar's mother said. "Due to her poor vision Elinar was experiencing some difficulties at school but after her surgery she studies much better. I am so thankful to the AECP for providing this support!"

Elinar is happy too. She plans to celebrate restored vision by enjoying her favorite books. "Now I can read my favorite fairy tales," she says with a smile. NEWSLETTER AECP 11

# GOING VIRTUAL IN 2020



### Virtual Benefit November 22, 2020

THERE WERE NO long ballgowns and five-course dinners but the most important feature of our annual fundraiser was still palpable: the desire to do good for the people of Armenia and provide critical relief at a time when the country and its people needed it most.

On the heels of the violent strikes on Artsakh that led to war in the region, our annual fundraising event took on a different role in 2020: to specifically raise funds to provide emergency relief for the civilians and soldiers affected by the war.

Within a few weeks of hearing what was going on in Armenia, our videographer Art Simon booked a flight to the country to document what was happening in real-time. Though he could not safely visit Artsakh, Art met with many refugee families in Armenia to talk of their recent

experiences and see how the AECP was helping them through such a difficult time.

On Sunday November 22, 2020 we shared with our friends and supporters all that our organization was doing in Armenia to help and what we needed to continue our critical care in the country. From following refugee families as they received eye screenings and follow-up care in our Mobile Eve Hospital to interviewing our doctors and staff to hear how they were treating injured soldiers and civilians and getting much-needed medical supplies and other resources to families, our Virtual Benefit acted as a lens to see what was happening in Armenia and an opportunity to lend a helping hand.

As always, our donors responded with open arms. With friends tuning in from all over the country, we were able

to raise nearly \$250,000 from hundreds of contributions. All of these funds are now being used to continue our relief efforts for those impacted by the war. Without your support, our current work in Armenia would be impossible.

# **Virtual Conference** February 15-18, 2021

Typically held in Yerevan. Armenia. our annual medical conference looked a little different this time as we moved our series of talks and presentations online. The AECP-International CHLA 18th Conference, organized by the Armenian EyeCare Project

(AECP) and Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Armenia, the World Diabetes Foundation and a number medical associations Armenia. began on September 23, 2020 with what was intended to be a two-week virtual event.

However, on September 27, 2020, with the launch of violent attacks along the border of Artsakh and taking into consideration the priorities of the healthcare system in Armenia at the time, we decided to postpone the remaining days of our

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### A PARTNERSHIP WITH CHLA

# STRENGTHENING MENTAL HEALTH IN ARMENIA

Children's Hospital LOS ANGELES

A decade-long collaboration between the Armenian EyeCare Project &

Children's Hospital Los Angeles

has recently
expanded
its reach to
strengthen
mental health in
Armenia.

with the double challenge presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent Artsakh War, the people of Armenia and Artsakh have been going through an enormously stressful and trying time and many of them need professional treatment to overcome these challenges.

By providing educational resources and training opportunities for mental health professionals. expanded an collaboration between the Armenian EyeCare Project (AECP) and Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) aims at addressing the current needs of the population related to psychological trauma and mental health issues that arose from the Artsakh War and the pandemic.

In the scope of this project, our organization alongside CHLA have partnered with a group of organizations and specialists, including the Armenian American Mental Health Association (AAMHA), Armenian Mental Health Institute (AMHI). Armenian Psvcho-Oncology Association (APOA) and the Yerevan State University Center of Applied Psychology. Together with international and local partners and colleagues, including about 20 Armenian diaspora members from North America, Asia and Europe, we strive to alleviate the incredible stress among Armenians and present effective coping mechanisms to support the population of Armenia.

Through our joint efforts, a comprehensive course consisting of 38 lectures on social reintegration and family support services; non-pharmacologic assistance with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); grief and bereavement; prevention of suicide; and secondary trauma management have been developed and published. The content of the courses is based on international reputable resources and is useful for various groups dealing with people who are undergoing stress and psychological trauma. The courses have been published on the Online Pediatric Educational Network (OPEN), a digital learning platform that has been developed through the collaboration of the AECP and CHLA and is provided to all Armenian caregivers in the field of mental health free of charge.

In addition, a series of training sessions has been organized for medical professionals, mental health specialists, social workers, education specialists and school administrators to enhance and up-

date their knowledge on the leading international trends in mental health management. By incorporating modern approaches like podcasts with CHLA experts and Armenian mental health professionals, leveraging the online educational platform and expanding the project's reach by targeting a variety of age groups, the project delivers tangible and effective results while continuing to focus on further expanding its curriculum development. If you would like to learn more about our joint Mental Health Project alongside CHLA and how you can help, please contact us at 949-933-4069 or info@eyecareproject.com

### **About Children's Hospital LA**

Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) has been named the best children's hospital in California and among the best in the nation for clinical excellence with its selection to the prestigious US News & World Report Honor Roll. CHLA is home to The Saban Research Institute, one of the largest and most productive pediatric research facilities in the U.S. CHLA is also one of America's premier teaching hospitals through its affiliation with the Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California.

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### IS PLANNED GIVING RIGHT FOR YOU?

With a simple planned gift you can help the AECP fulfill its mission in Armenia and have a huge impact in peoples' lives. Making a planned gift is meaningful and easy — and allows your generosity to last for generations.

A planned gift to the AECP will ensure that our organization continues its lifelong mission to eliminate preventable blindness in Armenia and offer quality eye care to every child and adult in the country.

From naming the AECP in your will, to charitable trusts, retirement plan gifts and gift annuities, there are many giving options to choose from. Your financial advisor or attorney can help you better understand all of your options and their benefits.

Your lasting legacy and compassion can guarantee that the AECP's sight-saving programs continue for years to come while also being able to provide you with financial benefits.

Speak to your financial advisor or attorney to see if planned giving is right for you. Learn more about how impactful planned giving can be at:

www.eyecareproject.com/planned-giving

## THE LEGACY OF SIGHT

Two modest men give generous bequests



Two donors who both led modest lives will leave an extraordinary impact on countless residents in Armenia through their bequests.



Vahakn Aqlamishian

Vahakn Aglamishian of Farmington Hills, Michigan, was the type of man who would buy the cheapest car on the lot but whose heart was full of love and generosity for the people of Armenia. That was proven tenfold when, upon his passing, Aglamishian bequeathed over \$950,000 to the Armenian EyeCare Project to be used to help children and adults in Armenia in desperate need of eye care.

"He felt giving to people in need was most important," Aglamishian's close friend and neighbor, Mioara, said. "His heart belonged to the children and people of Armenia and he dedicated his whole life to this cause." According to Mioara, Aglamishian was compelled to help the people of Armenia because of his family's own tragic experience during the Genocide. Aglamishian, she said, carried the burden of the Armenian Genocide deep in his soul. His father and aunt had been the only two survivors of the Genocide from their entire extended family, comprised of nearly 30 members. His father was taken to an orphanage in Bucharest, Romania, where he would settle, meet his wife and start a family of his own.

Born in Bucharest in 1946, Vahakn Aglamishian ultimately moved to the U.S. and worked as an engineer in the automotive industry. Still he continued to keep his devotion to his Armenian heritage close to his heart. He had thousands of books about Armenia and constantly read about the country's affairs. He also planned to visit Armenia but got too sick and was not able to make the trip.

Though Aglamishian never made it to Armenia, a piece of him will now be in the country forever. To celebrate Aglamishian's life and commitment to Armenia, the AFCP has named our newest eye center in his honor. The Vahakn Aglamishian AECP Regional Eve Center, which opened last fall and is located in Yeghegnadzor, will allow thousands more Armenians in this region to have guicker and more efficient access to eye care year-round.

Mioara says the legacy that Aglamishian leaves behind fits his character perfectly. "Vahakn was such a humble man living such a humble life," she says. "But he left a big impact on many people. He was like a hidden pearl. How precious he was! All he wanted was to be a help to his people."

With his generous bequest, there is no doubt Aglamishian will be an enormous help

Cont'd on pg. 17

## IN MEMORIAM:

# AECP REMEMBERS BOARD MEMBERS AND DEAR FRIENDS



### **JAMES MOURADICK**

James Mouradick served on the Board of Directors of the Armenian EyeCare Project for several years and aided immeasurably in raising money for our organization, both in the early years of the AECP and throughout his life.

"Jim was very imaginative and constantly thinking of different ways to raise money for our organization," AECP Founder and President Dr. Roger Ohanesian said. "He always had unique ideas and would often push us to think outside the box."

Jim's favorite quote was by author James Lee Burke: "People are what they do, not what they say, not what they think, not what they pretend to be." This was Jim's life mantra and one he strived to follow every day. Jim passed away late 2020. He will be missed by all of us at the AECP.



HAYK YERTISYAN

We were shocked and saddened by the news of Hayk Yertisyan, a great friend to the AECP, passing away on May 9 after contracting COVID-19. He was 48 years old.

AECP Founder and President Dr. Roger Ohanesian met Havk when he visited Armenia for the first time. Haik had recently finished his military service and acted as a guide, driver, translator and all-around Armenia's expert on emerging technology field.

Hayk always made time to connect with the AECP over the years, even when life got busy. We remember with great affection his visit to California and his time with Roger and Roger's wife, Eileen, while attending a technology course in Irvine.

He married Tatevik (née Galstian) in 2001 and their twins, Hrant and Arpi, were born 17 years ago this past March. His love for his wife and family was deeply felt. Hayk was very intelligent and in his understated, unassuming way he was a quiet, steady presence in a world where that is a rare gift indeed. Our hearts go out to his family.

### MARION PALANJIAN

Marion Palanjian served on the Board of Directors of the Armenian EyeCare Project for more than a decade and helped our organization considerably in fundraising and procuring much-needed items for our medical needs in Armenia. This included the critical in-kind donation of industrial tires for our Mobile Eye Hospital, which she and her husband, Jerry, provided to the AECP on several occasions as it was needed. Marion will also be remembered for her one-of-a-kind personality. "She was just a delight," AECP Founder and President Dr. Roger Ohanesian says. "Marion was always so pleasant to be around and well-liked by everyone who crossed her path. We will miss her smiling face and bright personality."

Marion passed away on January 16, 2021. She will be sorely missed by our entire AECP family.





### **GARY NAMAN**

Gary Naman served on the Board of Directors of the Armenian EyeCare Project and was very involved both as a board member and donor.

"Gary did a lot for the Armenian EyeCare Project and we will forever be grateful for his attention to the needs of our organization," AECP Founder and President Dr. Roger Ohanesian said. "He was a constant, consistent donor and someone you could always count on."

Gary passed away on March 14, 2021. He will be terribly missed.

15 NEWSLETTER

# A HEARTFELT THANKS TO ALL **OUR 2020 DONORS!**

### **Beauests**

Mr. Vahakn N. Aglamishian Ms. Arden M. Giligian Ms. Melina B. Hampikian Mr. Minas Minasian

### Organizations, **Foundations** & Companies

3 M's St. Mary Armenian Church Alcon Allergan Americans for Armenians Armenian International Foundation Armenian Memorial Church Armenian Renaissance Association Benevity Bilezikian Family Foundation Daughters of Vartan - Grand Council Davis Dental Davis Glaukos

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# FROM THE DESK OF:

**AECP Country Director Nune Yeghiazaryan** shares her thoughts

In early 2020 we learned of the first Coronavirus cases in Armenia. It seemed nothing worse could happen. The number of cases was rising and our country's health care system was being challenged every day. We knew this was a global catastrophe and we would feel its consequences for a long time.

We did not imagine, however, that aside from the fight against a deadly virus, 2020 would have more surprises for the Armenian people. But it did. This time, it was a war in Artsakh against peaceful civilians.

We were in the middle of our International Conference. which had started just a few days prior. Everything was going well. We had adjusted to the situation of the pandemic and organized the conference as a big online event with hundreds of participants from 20 countries. It seemed we had forgotten the nightmare of the war from 30 years past but news of the attack took us back to that time and our lives were, once again, changed forever.

Our attention immediately shifted to the war and the dire needs of the wounded Armenian soldiers, their families and those who came to Armenia for refuge. Our typical routine and daily activities changed. Whatever we did we were thinking of our fellow Armenians who were fighting and praying for their right toward self-determination, freedom and a secure life.



We organized humanitarian aid for Artsakh families, a medical mission to Artsakh by our chief surgeon, the provision of much-needed medical equipment and supplies to ophthalmic hospitals in Armenia and more. Armenians from Artsakh remain the center of our attention as we continue to organize special programs for them, assist the healthcare system in Artsakh and much more.

Today we are fully aware of the great losses Armenia

has had. But with the belief that our hard work, unity and trust in the future will be our guiding stars, we continue our work toward a brighter Armenia. Armenia experienced genocide over 100 years ago and has gone through many hardships since that time. But we continue to put our faith in peace, stability and the value of human life. We believe our voices will be heard and we, as Armenians, will continue our journey in the world as a stronger Armenia.

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### **ALCON GIVES GENEROUS** IN-KIND DONATION

Alcon, a medical company and global leader specializing in eye care, recently donated several pieces of critical medical equipment to the Armenian EyeCare Project. Through its foundation, Alcon Cares, an in-kind donation of nine pieces of state-of-theart eye equipment was made to the AECP in May 2021. This includes extremely valuable and crucial equipment for eye care like a Constellation Vitrector, Infinity Phaco machine and several surgical microscopes and instru-

Some of this equipment will help tremendously in the treatment of Armenians who have been badly wounded from the recent Artsakh War, as it will allow foreign objects to be removed from the inner eye and prevent vision damage from ocular trauma. Thanks to Alcon's generous donation, local and highly

ments.

trained physicians in Armenia will now have the cutting-edge equipment necessary to perform these vital, sight-saving procedures on Armenia's af-

fected population.

We would like to offer our utmost gratitude to Alcon and to AECP Volunteer Physician, Dr. Dwayne Baharozian, who has helped facilitate this monumental in-kind donation for the AECP. With Dr. Baharozian's help and through the extreme generosity of Alcon, more than \$1 million worth of much-needed medical material has been donated to the AECP since 2017. The results that come from the use of these great inkind donations are priceless.



### Legacy of Sight, Cont'd from pg. 13

NEWSLETTER

to people in need in Armenia. "We're only in this world for a short time," Aglamishian's friend, Mioara, says. "What we do in that time, we leave behind for people to discover. That is what Vahakn did and it's a wonderful thing."

#### **Minas Minasian**

Minas Minasian was also a simple man with a big heart. Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, Minasian cared deeply about Armenian causes and contributed to many Armenian organizations in his lifetime. Donating over \$600,000 to the Armenian EyeCare Project during his

life and bequeathing over \$500,000 to our organization upon his passing last year, Minasian has given over \$1 million to the AECP alone to be used for our several sight-saving services in Armenia.

Serving in the armed forces during World War II and working as an accountant upon returning from service, Minasian was a hard worker who lived modestly throughout his life. Instead of spending his earnings on lavish items, Minasian placed value on things he deemed more important, like family. He looked after his older sister when she became ill and spent quality time with his father and mother as they shared stories of their lives

back home in Kharpert (historic Armenia.)

In fact, when making his donations, Minasian would always insist: "This is not from me, but from my father, mother and sister."

He was simple yet profound, knowing the true value of life came from helping others. "I have everything I need," Minasian would say. "Now I want to help my nation and the people of Armenia."

There is no doubt that with the over \$1 million Minasian has donated to the AECP, he will have an enormous impact on the people of Armenia just as he wished to have. The AECP is financed entirely through donations. So when a contribution is made to our organization, in any amount, it means we are able to continue our sight-saving programs and services in Armenia.

The incredible generosity in the form of posthumous bequests from both Aglamishian and Minasian is guaranteed to have a lifelong impact on eye care in Armenia that will last for generations to come.

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### **Vision Referral** Program, Cont'd from pg. 6

As such the Vision Referral Program will develop and expand its global network to enable remote and virtual, peer-to-peer consultation between an eye care specialist in Armenia and a colleague in another country, referred to as a Global Consultant. Global Consultants will include individuals and organizations outside of Armenia such as AECP volunteer physicians, non-AECP-affiliated ocular experts, consulting organizations and training and education organizations.

The Vision Referral Program will enhance the AE-CP's treatment and rehabilitation capacities to offer the patient, individually or in combination, low vision aids (optical and non-optical devices, mobility and occupational training, etc.); ocular prosthetics and/or reoperation.

The AECP encourages all individuals or organizations who know of an injured Armenian in need of eye care to fill out a referral form. Forms can be found on our website: www.eyecareproject.com

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### Low Vision Center, Cont'd from pg. 7

"The Low Vision Center receives many patients who've been treated in clinics across Armenia and require follow-up low vision care," said Dr. Gevorgyan. "Because of the robust low vision model AECP has developed in Armenia. we are also able to serve patients from neighboring countries in the region, helping all our patients preserve the maximum possible vision depending on the complexity of each case."

As part of the ongoing services available at AECP's Low Vision Center, patients have access to computer training programs. For people with visual impairments, the possibility of using a computer is a big step forward in obtaining information, access to learning new skills and gaining computer literacy. The Low Vision Center also offers programs for visually impaired children to teach them skills that would ensure the highest possible level of independence in performing daily tasks like

reading, watching television, and using a computer. This specialized low vision treatment opens a new world for the visually impaired, providing patients with a renewed hope to continue living a full and independent

The Low Vision Center is currently in need of additional equipment to prepare for an influx of patients as more soldiers civilians underao and post-war treatment and rehabilitation. This includes and non-optical optical devices like telescopic glasses, magnifiers, writing guides and canes as well as mobility and computer training related needs to ensure patients' independence like various programs, voice smart phones and computers. If you'd like more information what equipment is needed for our Low Vision Center, please contact us at 949-933-4069 and we can provide a full list. With your support we can enhance this much-needed Center with the resources needed for the visually impaired in Armenia to thrive!

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### **AECP Goes Virtual.** Cont'd from pg. 11

International Conference until a time when things were more stable in the region.

Δfter several months. the AECP was able to reschedule the remainder of our conference to February 15-18, 2021. With topics in ophthalmology, neonatology and general pediatrics, lecturers from Armenia as well as speakers from some of the best universities and hospitals in the U.S. gathered virtually to cover subspecialties including glaucoma, oculoplastics, corneal disease, pediatric endocrinology, pediatric cardiology and much more.

Despite the circumstances for moving the conference online, the virtual platform offered up the opportunity to increase the number of conference participants and geographical scope of the event. As well, all materials and lectures from the conference were recorded and stored online, becoming available at no cost to those who wished to access them and providing a unique selfeducation opportunity to physicians and healthcare providers from all over the world. With hundreds healthcare workers participating around the globe, and despite the difficult circumstances endured throughout the process, our virtual conference was able to move forward in the name advancing medical education and providing the highest quality of care!

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### AND MANY THANKS TO ALL OUR DOCTORS FOR THEIR DEDICATION IN TREATING ARMENIANS IN NEED

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Dr. Dwayne Baharozian

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Dr. George Bohigian

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### The Armenian EyeCare Project

### U.S. Office

### Armenia Office

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### **AECP Mission Statement:**

To eliminate preventable blindness in Armenia and to make quality eye care accessible to every child and adult in the country



















Images from a refugee camp in Armenia, October 2020.