

# Doctor does 'Lord's work'

Dr. Charles Duvall of Hilton Head Island is part of Volunteers in Medicine.

By **GLORIA E. SINGLETON**  
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The walls in this doctor's man-cave are hidden behind shelves of non-medical books and framed degrees, awards and citations.

A book lies on a small table — "Chicken Soup for the Soul,

Living with Alzheimer's and Other Dementias."



Duvall

Dr. Charles Duvall, 79, was born in Evanston, Ill. His family moved to Washington, D.C., in the 1940s. He

lived there until 1999, when he and his wife, of 57 years, Nancy, moved to Hilton Head Island. They have four children and 12 grandchildren.

Duvall graduated from Cornell University in 1958 and from the University of Rochester in 1962 with a medical degree. He retired at age 62 after 31 years of practicing medicine.

"I was burned out and fed up by constant threats of lawsuits and government interference in medicine," Duvall said.

That "burned out" feeling didn't last. In 2000, he found that Volunteers in Medicine offered him the best of both worlds.

"I continued being a doctor without the hassles of my own practice," he said.

"Dr. Duvall is one of our star

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## DOCTOR

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physicians. His compassion and empathy for his patients is remarkable. He is one of a group of physicians I have great respect for and for their circle of caring. That's why the clinic works," said Raymond Cox, VIM's executive director.

He still serves at VIM once a week but resigned from the board in 2009 to take care of Nancy.

"My biggest challenge has been watching her suffer progressively with Alzheimer's for the past fifteen years. She got to a point where I couldn't take care of her," he explained.

He visits her daily at the nursing home where she's been for the past two years.

"She no longer knows me or our children," he said.

"Alzheimer's brings a period of grieving. Suddenly, no one is in bed with me. Some nights I roll over, thinking she is still there and say, 'I'm sorry,'" he continued.

"There's also a progressive feeling of isolation. Friends don't know what to do. The invitations dry up," he added.

He feels freer now to pursue interests like golfing and painting.

"The price for my freedom is an emotional black hole that seems never-ending," he said.

Golfing friend Paul Lang, who's known Duvall since 2000, called him "one of the most caring people you'd ever meet. He uses his medical ability to help his friends and others."

Since 2000, Duvall has been involved at First Presbyterian Church, where he headed the missions' ministry for three years and became part of its global initiative. He supported two "sons" in Nairobi, Kenya, under the Bahati Scholars Program, sending orphans

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Charles Duvall

living in dumps to private high schools.

He also helped introduce an elderly portable housing concept to Hilton Head, where scores of church and community volunteers have made a difference in the recipients' quality of life.

Duvall is going on his second church-sponsored medical mission trip to Haiti in April, along with other medical staff.

"I'll see around 20 patients a day, provide physical exam updates and review and provide medicine ... the same as we do at VIM," he said.

As a board member of the Memory Matters organization, he's active in its support groups and helps oversee dementia and Alzheimer's programs, including day care.

"Dr. Duvall provides hope, direction, comfort and advice to families, especially male caregivers," said Ashley Gruber, a Memory Matters counselor.

His essay and one of his paintings, Gathering Storm, are featured in "Meet Me Where I Am," a book by Alzheimer's spouses and caretakers. The painting hangs in their building.

He sees his service as something greater than himself. Says Duvall, "When trying to do God's will, there is more energy and perhaps better outcome, for it is not the disciple's work but rather the Lord's."