

ALBERTA RURAL PHYSICIAN SPOUSES AND FAMILY
Be Understood Be Empowered Be a Mentor Be Taught Be Entertained Be Accepted Be Inspired Be Yourself

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Happy New Year! A new year is upon us and winter has arrived! If you enjoy outdoor activities with family and friends you are living in the most sought after part of the country for the fresh white snow. Skiing, tobogganing, skating anyone! Time to refresh the RPAP Rural Spousal and Family Hotsheet. This edition of the Hotsheet will update you with upcoming activities and share a story of one family and their journey from South Africa to Rural Alberta.

1. From South Africa to Rural Northern Alberta: The Community Made the Difference!

This article was written by members of the Erasmus family sharing their experience of moving to Alberta, community recruitment committee members providing examples of support offered to the family, and Rebekah Seidel, RPAP Rural Physician Consultant, North.

Drs. Francois and Magda Erasmus, 10 year old Stefan and 7 year old Karla arrived in Redwater, AB, a town of under 3,000 about 68 km north east of Edmonton, in summer 2006. Their arrival was community affair which saw them welcomed by health professionals and community representatives. Redwater, with its physician recruitment and retention committee in place for the past ten years, recognizes the importance of those first impressions of a community for newcomers. They know that welcoming and supporting a physician to a new place of work is not enough; the

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whole family needs to be welcomed, supported and integrated into the community. Ensuring the family unit as a whole is happy is directly related to ensuring physician retention.

Redwater and the Erasmus family first “met” through a mutual contact in Smoky Lake. Terry Danchuk, the Chairperson of the Redwater and District Physician Recruitment Committee, talked with the Erasmus’s in South Africa by phone several times, sharing information on the health needs of the community, as well as what it is like living in Canada, particularly rural Alberta. This

long distance communication and support led to an initial invitation for the Erasmus family to visit Redwater. The community organized a welcome/appreciation dinner event in October 2005, which included dignitaries and other doctors from town in attendance. A collaborative effort was underway to sell the community and surrounding area to the new visitors; an effort which paid off with a commitment from the Erasmus’s while in Redwater on this



visit to return to stay. The Committee began the paperwork while the family was in Canada, as well as introducing them to the businesses, school personnel and other organizations

they would need to get to know and soon become a part of.

The whole process of recruiting Drs. Francois and Magda Erasmus was a collaborative community effort, including support from the Town of Redwater, Capital Health Region, the County of Sturgeon and RPAP. The town bought a house for the family, offering it rent free for the first six months. An arrangement was made between the town and a local auto dealership for a car for the family for six months free of charge, with the option of putting the money the town paid for the six months towards the purchase of the car if desired.

As welcoming gifts, items were purchased for the children including toys and bicycles. The town council picked up the rent on the doctor office and supplied a secretary for three months. Terry Danchuk and other recruitment committee members ensured the Erasmus family had what they needed, including having community members available for transportation and other assistance in settling in.

The success did not happen by accident! Redwater's Recruitment Committee has been in operation for ten years and they have worked hard. The two other doctors in town; Dr.

Godwin Mouton, commencing practice in January 1999 and Dr. Johannes Botha with a practice established in August of 2000, were also recruited from South Africa by the Redwater's Recruitment Committee. Plenty has been learned through the years by trial and error. They have successful experiences to share with others.

An album / journal of pictures, articles and momentos of events has been created as a community gift for all three physician families. As the recent physician recruits become more settled, the album / journal offers lots of positive memories of those first few months. Below are some photos since their arrival showing the continued support of the community.

The family felt warmth from the community from the moment they arrived. Dr. Magda Erasmus speaks of how the community made their transition to their new country and home a very welcoming experience. The house was ready to move in with the cupboards stocked with food and transportation available as needed. The Recruitment Committee and town council did a wonderful job of having things in place for them, ensuring that things would run smoothly for their introduction to life in the community of Redwater. Drs. Mouton and Botha have been very supportive and

provided a connection with their home country South Africa. The children have made friends at school and enjoy out of school activities. The focus for the next few years is to establish the medical practice, spend time with the children and continue settling into their new community.

A major suggestion from Magda for new doctors and their families coming to rural Alberta is to make sure to go out and interact with people in the community. Magda feels that this has been made easier for them as the children are in school and bring friends home, thus offering all kinds of opportunities to connect with other families in the community.

Family and friends in South Africa continue to be missed, and the Erasmus family celebrated the New Year with a trip to their home land. Redwater is feeling more and more like home and Magda packed her laptop so that she could stay in touch with her Redwater friends by email while she was gone!

For more information contact **Rebekah Seidel**, RPAP Rural Physician Consultant at 403- 843-4879 or rebekah.seidel@rpap.ab.ca

Copies of the RPAP Orientation Guide can be received by contacting the RPAP office at 1-866-423-9911 or by email at Alberta-RPAP@rpap.ab.ca.

Photos for encouragement to their arrival in rural Alberta and activities they have participated in while in Redwater, AB.



Dr. Johannes Botha, Redwater, AB holding up a sign "Hurry Please" (a little humour can go a long way)



Appreciation Cake for all three Redwater doctors at a Community event in fall 2006.



Halloween costumes of staff at the Redwater Health Centre, including Sister Magdalena on the left (Dr. Magda Erasmus)!

2. Supporting New Physician Families in your Community: The Role of a Local Spouse.

This article has been written by Anthea Maseka, a physician spouse, wife of Dr. Dereck Maseka, living in Drumheller, AB having moved with family in 2005 from Australia.

In Australia Spousal and Family programs for rural physicians are very popular. Local communities engage with physicians and their families to support their participation in the community on an ongoing basis. In her home country of Australia, Anthea was very active with recruitment and retention of rural physicians with the local communities in a role as the Spousal Representative. Anthea shares below her description of the role of a Spousal Representative offering an opportunity for physician spouses in rural Alberta to consider such a role in their own local community. **If you are interested in becoming involved as a Spousal Representative, please call RPAP 1-866-423-9911 or your Regional Recruitment Coordinator.**

SPOUSAL REPRESENTATIVE

Overview

This is a spouse of a medical doctor who deals with the social aspect of medical families in order to help them have a positive experience during their stay in the community. By having a positive experience in a community, it is hoped that this would help retain the physicians and their families in the area. Research does show that this is true.

Profile

The Spousal Representative represents all medical doctors and their families in his/her area. This involves:

1. Meeting newcomers in their area and helping them settle in by offering helpful information about the town and surrounding areas and also giving them information on other medical families in the area.
2. Communicating needs, life events (birth, death, weddings etc) of medical families in the area to the community network as appropriate. These are published in a local magazine for the information of medical families.
3. Organizing and coordinating social activities for doctors and their families once or twice a year. The aim of these activities is to build relationships that help support families in good times and hard times. These social activities would normally take place alongside some medical conference/seminars.
4. Attending regional meetings where planning and information on the community and spouses and families are shared.
5. Helping to make the community and spouses and families networks known to other spouses by advertising it at social gatherings.

3. Upcoming Events

1. January 19-21, 2007 Banff Rural Emergency Medicine Conference.

MORNING EVENT FOR SPOUSES AND CHILDREN
SATURDAY JANUARY 20, 2007 • BANFF PARK LODGE
08:30 TO 09:15 BREAKFAST • CHINOOK PRIVATE ROOM
09:30 TO 09:50 THE BASICS OF CHINESE COOKING • TERRACE LOUNGE
09:50 TO 11:15 FENG SHUI AND RURAL FAMILY LIVING • TERRACE LOUNGE

FENG SHUI AND RURAL FAMILY LIVING

Did you know the roots of Feng Shui are in rural life? In ancient times, people required an intimate understanding of the cycles of nature for their survival. They used Feng Shui to site their homes and farms, successfully grow their crops, and live a balanced life together. Feng Shui is the study of natural cycles and successful living. This seminar will introduce you to the art of Feng Shui, how it works and how you can assess areas of your own rural living using some simple tools. This will be an interactive session where the adults focus on ideas related to family, relationships and community and children of all ages will be an integral part of the whole through various activities and supports during this time. cont.

OUR SPEAKER • GINA DOLINSKY is a recognized Feng Shui Consultant and teacher. Gina has been practicing and teaching Feng Shui since 1998. She designs environments that support successful living and business prosperity. She delivers practical and informative workshops on Feng Shui. Gina has a BSc in Human & Social Development, with 20 years of clinical and analysis experience in the Canadian health care system.

TO REGISTER OR FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Monica E. Kohlhammer • RPAP Rural Physician Consultant

Tel: 403-283-1480 • Cell: 403-650-6292

Email: monica.kohlhammer@rpap.ab.ca

Feel free to register in advance or join us the morning of the event!

See you soon!

2. February 8 - 11, 2007, Kananaskis

UofC/RPAP

Cabin Fever Family Medicine Faculty Development Event.

A variety of activities will be available to choose from for spouses and children during the weekend. Registration of family members will occur on Thursday evening, at which time a detailed list of activity options will be provided. Some activities will be structured; others will be on a drop-in basis, all will provide excellent opportunities to enjoy the great environment found in Kananaskis!

RPAP continues to sponsor spouse/family and children's events at these events. Check the RPAP website www.rpap.ab.ca for information if planning to attend these events.

4. Tools for Planning Spousal Events

The RPAP has developed an Event Planner to help spouses more easily plan local events. The Rural Physician Consultant will support the spouse(s) in completing the Event Planner. The Planner provides a checklist of things to consider when planning for local community events. For more information or to get involved by hosting a local spousal/family event, please contact the RPAP office at 1-866-423-9911 or by email at Alberta-RPAP@rpap.ab.ca.

5. Consider a Local/Regional Get-Together for Your Area (town, city or region)

Please send ideas to RPAP for a future Hotsheet so other spouses can take advantage of the ideas for their own community.

Rural Medicine in Alberta
A Breath of Fresh Air!

6. Keep Informed - Rural Physician Spousal Web Pages

If you're the spouse or life partner of a rural physician, just provide us with your contact information and we'll send you periodic updates about news and events happening across the province. We do most of our communication by regular mail (post) and by email. We never share or sell our contact lists, and you can ask to be removed from our contact list at any time.

Send us your residential contact information including name, address, postal code, home phone, fax, and email address:

- By email: Alberta-rpap@rpap.ab.ca;
- By phone: 780-423-9911 or toll-free at 1-866-423-9911;
- By fax: 780-423-9917.

Keep informed of activities related to spouse and family programs and rural lifestyle through The Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan website: www.rpap.ab.ca.

For more information about the Rural Physician Spousal and Family Programming, contact:

RPAP 1-866-423-9911 or
Alberta-RPAP@rpap.ab.ca or the
Rural Physician Consultant in
your area:

South: Monica Kohlhammer
403-283-1480 or
monica.kohlhammer@rpap.ab.ca.

North: Rebekah Seidel
403-843-4879 or
rebekah.seidel@rpap.ab.ca.

Rural Physician Spousal and Family Programming is sponsored by The Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan. Its mission is to "promote the retention of rural physicians in Alberta through spousal and family networking, communication and programs that foster personal growth and satisfaction with rural living."