

## Dr. Rick comes loaded with experience

Written by Chris Lee

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Experience. A wide range of experience is what captured the attention of Melissa Memorial Hospital administration when looking at reasons to bring Dr. Rick Amesquita on board.

“Dr. Rick” began duties last week, Tuesday, Jan. 4 at MMH and said, “I’m happy to be here.”

“He’s had such a wealth of experience,” MMH administrator John Ayoub said. “He’s not hoarding that to himself. He shares that with other people.”

Amesquita was born in Pasadena, Calif. and raised in the San Diego, Calif. area. He was the first in his family to graduate from high school and continue his education.

After high school, he joined the Air Force where he began an EMT Paramedic course. In 1983 he finished the course and became a paramedic. He noted most of his service time was spent in peace time.

A highlight of his service was when he was stationed on the USNS Mercy hospital ship that went to the Philippines. He said it was something different for an Air Force serviceman to be staffed on a Navy ship.

He spent six months in the Philippines and said while there the work was hard and the hours were long, but the rewards were great. Time was spent in villages helping the people out. He said one of his main tasks was prescribing food. “You think that’s kind of silly, but they needed food, water and shelter,” Amesquita said, “just as you or I.”

He said the people kept calling him a doctor while he was there, not knowing he actually wasn’t a doctor. The thought of becoming a doctor crossed his mind in high school, but he didn’t take that path right away.

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He thought to himself after his time in the Air Force, "Maybe it's time I take that path."

He began college in 1985, nearly 10 years after high school graduation. He noted it was difficult because the military kept calling him away.

He credits a lot of his education to the military. Over a period of time, he challenged the nursing boards in California and became an R.N. He was then named an independent duty medic. "Basically I was the medical provider for whatever unit I was attached to," he said.

After 15 years in the military, he got out to attend P.A. (physician assistant) school at the University of Utah in 1996 and became a P.A. He worked for 11 years as a P.A. in Detroit, Mich.

His internship was with Henry Ford Hospital in the Clinton Township where he did a lot of the training. "That was an awesome place to be," Amesquita said.

Another interesting part of his past is the time he spent helping victims of Hurricane Katrina. He said it was hard for him to sit and watch it on television when he knew he could be helping people in need.

He called his school and requested permission to be deployed, because he was still in school doing a rotation in Oklahoma. His wife Lori, who is trained in psychology, went with him. "We went as a team," Amesquita said.

The duo spent time at Camp Gruber in Oklahoma where roughly 1,500 people from the Superdome were dispersed.

He had the opportunity to see and help take care of a baby born on the floor of the Superdome. When he saw the baby, it was only 13 days old.

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After their time in Oklahoma, the couple was deployed to Alexandria, La., at which time they were hit by Hurricane Rita.

“All of this stuff has given me my core of interests and experiences,” he said.

He also credits numerous mentors in helping him reach the point where he is today.

Amesquita is really interested in disaster preparedness and emergency response. He would like to become involved with the EMS in Holyoke sometime in the future.

Amesquita compared MMH to his time in the military saying it’s like a cadre. “You kind of take care of each other and stick together. That’s one thing I really like about working here. It seems like everyone tries to take care of each other.”

Amesquita said he has been involved with a number of critical access hospitals and MMH is by far the nicest one he has been in.

“The organization is made of the people, and the people are the greatest,” he said of the staff at MMH and Family Practice of Holyoke.

As stated at the Dec. 28 board meeting, Amesquita hasn’t finished a residency. The one he began ended due to financial reasons. “I think that was to our benefit,” Ayoub said.

“I think there are some organizations that have not looked at Dr. Rick, not because he’s not a great guy or a great doctor, but because on paper, it’s not the way everybody else has done it. I think this is an opportunity for us to seize a diamond.”

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“As soon as we get the insurance piece, we’re going to have him in the clinic seeing patients,” Ayoub said. He is hoping the pieces are in place within the next few weeks.

“He has the personality that we’re looking for,” Ayoub said. “He’s a fun-loving guy, a great doctor and good person. Really, what more could you ask for?”

Learning is something Amesquita hopes to never quit. He currently doesn’t handle any OB and hopes someday down the road that will be different.

Keeping up with medicine is something all doctors must deal with, as is evident with the electronic medical records that were recently implemented within the hospital.

Ayoub mentioned the hospital is looking forward to getting Amesquita introduced and acquainted with Holyoke. He plans to attend the health fair in February to get a chance to reach out a little.

Amesquita’s wife, Lori, is tethered to Denver and will not be moving to Holyoke in the near future. The doctor said his daughter recently received a job, and so his wife has been left in charge of taking care of the grandkids—a job, he said, his wife loves.

His family is all really close and he used the expression “It takes a village to raise a child” to describe his family. Until recently, he had four generations living under his roof. His father was living with them as well as their grandchildren.

The couple has three children and five grandchildren.

In his spare time when he isn’t helping his wife with the “grandcritters,” he enjoys golfing, hunting and fishing.