

Conflict has reverberations in Triad

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Medge Owen (in blue) demonstrates an epidural on a woman in labor at Orioni Hospital in Tbilisi, Georgia. Local media covered it. Photo Courtesy of Medge Owen.



Two Triad area women who are committed to improving the quality of life in Georgia are worried about what kind of effect Russia's invasion will have on a country they have come to love.

Robin Sizemore of High Point has ties to Georgia that run deep. She and her husband, James, adopted two of their three children from Georgia, a fledgling democracy and former republic of the Soviet Union. Moved by the generosity of the Georgians while she was adopting her children, Sizemore began organizing humanitarian projects that included renovating orphanages, installing generators and sending over teams of dentists and orthopedists.

A few years ago, Sizemore started Hopscotch

Adoptions, a nonprofit international adoption agency. One of the focuses of Hopscotch is the adoption of special-needs children in Georgia.

Hopscotch has found foster homes in Georgia for 18 special-needs children. Seven of those children have been matched with adoptive families and are waiting for their adoptions to become final.

Sizemore said that her thoughts have been with those children and their foster families.

Although Russian President Dmitri Medvedev ordered a stop to military operations in Georgia yesterday, there were reports of continued ground fighting. About 2,000 people have been killed in the fighting, the Russian government said yesterday.

Sizemore, who returned from Georgia on Aug. 3, said she has tried e-mailing and calling friends and foster families with no luck. She said she is particularly worried about some of the bedbound children who need frequent medical attention.

"Obviously this has been very emotional," Sizemore said. "But I'm sitting in the executive director's chair, and you have to have your critical-thinking cap on and say, 'How can we best take care of the children who are stuck in this and stand to be in harm's way? How do we take care of our foster families who are taking care of them?' We're trying to figure out how to assist those children with government services being interrupted."

Without government assistance, foster families will have to pay for food and services from their own limited income.

"The day-to-day expenses are outrageous," Sizemore said. "It's like living over here but on \$240 a month."

Dr. Medge Owen said she, too, is concerned.

Owen is a professor of obstetric anesthesia at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center and the founder of Kybele Inc., a nonprofit organization that works to promote safe childbirth in several countries, including Georgia.

Kybele has taken four trips to Georgia to teach obstetric anesthesia to medical professionals there, as well as to donate equipment. A 12-person group is scheduled to visit Georgia in late October.

"We planned to visit 10 to 12 hospitals all over the country, so now, obviously, that is in jeopardy," Owen said.

One of those stops was in the city of Gori, which was bombed by the Russians.

Owen said that Kybele has established strong connections with medical professionals and officials in Georgia's health ministry. Dr. Brittany Clyne, a Charlotte anesthesiologist and a former resident at Baptist, even met with Georgia's first lady, Sandra Roelofs, on a recent visit.

"This was going to be our best trip so far," Owen said.

Like Sizemore, Owen and Clyne haven't been able to reach friends in Georgia.

Both Sizemore and Owen said they continue to work in Georgia because of the warmth of the people.

"The hospitality they show guests is not just words, it's ingrained in their culture, down to their last piece of bread, their last drink of water," Sizemore said. "It's who they are."

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