



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terrence Murphy

Strike Force 40 hits home run for Puerto Rico

TERRENCE MURPHY October 21, 2017

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Puerto Rico - When Hurricane Maria ripped through Puerto Rico, it turned a paradise into a barren countryside with no electricity, clean water or medical supplies for the thousands of inhabitants trying to survive. Senator Terrence saw the suffering and resolve of the Puerto Rican people and pledged to help them. He contacted Dean Robert Amler, M.D., M.B.A., Vice President of Government Affairs for New York Medical College and Michael Reilly, Dr. P.H., M.P.H., Director of the Center of Excellence in Precision Responses to Bioterrorism and Disasters at New York Medical College to formulate a plan of action. They swiftly assembled an expert medical team to fly to Puerto Rico and provide desperately needed medical care. A

private plane was secured through Eric Faulkner, General Manager of Ross Aviation through an anonymous donor, and the Greater New York Hospital Association (GNYHA) donated 1,000 doses of vaccines. Within 96 hours of its creation, the team, dubbed "Strike Force 40" was ready for take-off.

On October 20, ironically on the one-month anniversary of Hurricane Maria, Senator Murphy, Dr. Amler, Dr. Reilly and the members of Strike Force 40, (named in Senator Murphy's senate district), gathered at a press conference held at New York Medical College in Hawthorne to provide details of their humanitarian trip to Puerto Rico.

Peter Michaelis a former journalist for ABC and CBS News whose photos have been distributed by United Press International (UPI) and the Associated Press (AP) **documented the team's often-harrowing mission**. Michaelis' striking photos lined the conference room and the hallway, telling their own story of the suffering of the island's inhabitants, as well as the significance of the team's mission.

"When Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico my office was inundated with phone calls. Many of the callers had relatives on the island and were asking if someone could help them," said Senator Murphy. "We carried everything we needed on the plane. We were ready to set up virtually as soon as our wheels hit the ground. But we never would have gotten where we needed to go without the assistance of the San Juan Police. Officers from the New York Port Authority were ready to hand out ready-to-eat meals and water. We had translators on hand, which was critical for us to be able to help people. It was a team effort, everyone worked together for this one mission."

Dr. Amler said, "It was exactly a month ago that the hurricane struck. You can really see the devastation of what occurred on the island in Peter Michaelis' photos. This was not just a

crisis; this was a disaster of epic proportions. Local resources and national resources were put to the test. We had to respond as a nation. We had a great team comprised of amazing individuals, but our success depended on our acting as a team. When people saw that we were there to help, the news spread like ripples in a pond; it went out in all directions. I would like to think we gave more than vaccines - we gave them hope."

"Our primary mission was to administer a thousand vaccinations for tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis," said Dr. Reilly. "Statistically, when you vaccinate that many people a small percentage may have an allergic reaction. We made sure we prepared to monitor and treat anyone for any adverse effects the vaccination might cause. Secondly, the pharmacies there were either closed or destroyed by the hurricane. We would be encountering people who had COPD, high blood pressure and diabetes whose conditions had been heightened by the lack of available medication. We were prepared to provide them with treatment that would provide them with relief."

Lee Perlman, President of GNYHA Ventures said, "A lot of people from the mainland have talked about going to Puerto Rico, but not a lot have actually gone. The reality is every effort to help changes the barometer. It may seem like a thousand vaccines is not much, but you cannot put a price on helping children. I think the photos and the team's stories provide a road map for how Puerto Rico can be helped. It can be helped one person at a time by dedicated physicians. Missions like Strike Force 40 have been successful because we have taken direct administration of our efforts. Kudos for making this mission happen, and for actually making a difference."

In addition to Dr. Amler and Dr. Riley, the Strike Force 40 medical team was comprised of Ed Larre, Jose Montalvo, and Megan Florio. Martha Ruiz-Jimenez volunteered to serve as translator.

The contributions of Jay Reyes, the Westchester County Department of Emergency Services, the Puerto Rican Governor and Lieutenant Governor were also deeply appreciated and acknowledged by Strike Force 40. Reyes, General Sales Manager for White Plains Lincoln, was instrumental in organizing a community drive to provide the residents of Puerto Rico with items such as first aid kits, flashlights and baby supplies.

Senator Murphy had previously spearheaded a relief mission to aid Texas after Hurricane Harvey had barreled through the Lone Star State. Thanks to generous donations from concerned citizens in the 40th Senate District, over 50,000 pounds of supplies were transported to the Gulf area in an 18-wheeler donated by Tiso Trucking.