

## Flying Matters: Wings of Hope Uses Planes to Give Others a Better Way of Life

Charity uses aviation as a tool for hope.

By [CAROLENRIGHT](#) Posted JULY 9, 2014

Wings of Hope pilot, T.J. Stewart, will never forget the day he made an unplanned stop during his regularly scheduled flying medical clinics serving 24 villages in rural Tanzania. Usually, this village was the day's last stop, but he had changed course to give a woman who had just given birth at the hospital in Arusha a ride back to her village. After dropping off the new mother, he prepared to take off to complete his rounds. Suddenly, he saw an elderly woman timidly approach the plane. The old woman's niece had just miscarried and was behind a tree on the airstrip bleeding. Stewart and a flight nurse found her lying in a pool of blood and slipping out of consciousness. They knew getting her to the hospital immediately was her only chance of survival. So they lifted the young woman with blood dripping down her legs into the plane and flew her to the hospital. Their day had just begun. They had four more villages and hundreds of patients – mostly pregnant women and newborn babies – waiting for the airborne clinic to arrive.

Stewart spent three years flying the medical clinics in Tanzania – just one of many international bases the 52-year-old aviation charity Wings of Hope operates worldwide. Flying for humanitarian purposes has given Stewart a unique perspective on his love for aviation.

"I do like flying and enjoy aviation – just like a farmer likes his tractor or a carpenter likes his hammer," he reflects. "Because, for me, aviation is not a way of life; it is a tool to be used to give others a better way of life – and to give the hopeless hope."



### Wings of Hope Guyana

\*\* Teen girls who recently completed the Wings of Hope sponsored Camp GLOW (Girls Leading Our World) girl empowerment and leadership camp in Guyana.\*\*

Stewart's comments sum up Wings of Hope's view of its planes in the field.

In Tanzania, as is typical of any Wings of Hope base – whether in Nicaragua, Ecuador, the Congo, Belize or Burma – the airplane is the means of delivering resources to the poor. Often, those resources are medical supplies and doctors. Sometimes, they are construction materials to drill a well or build a school. They may be seeds and baby chicks to support sustainable food programs. In other cases, they are teachers and education programs. In every base, the plane flies emergency medical evacuations – flying a child with a snake bite or a mother who needs an emergency C-section – to nearby hospitals.

Because of the unpredictable nature of remote areas and the extreme needs of the impoverished rural populations Wings of Hope serves, its pilots must be "jacks of all trades."

"Every pilot we've had in the field has had to help a woman give birth," says Wings of Hope President Doug Clements.

"They're not pilots," Clements goes on to explain. "They're humanitarians, who happen to be good mechanics, who happen to know how to raise chickens and fish and pigs, who happen to know how to grow crops, who happen to know how to find fresh water by drilling a hole or collecting it from the sky. They also happen to know how to be extremely kind to the people they help."

In the United States Wings of Hope is in its 12th year of its Medical Relief and Air Transport (MAT) Program. This program connects disabled and chronically ill individuals with specialized medical care that they cannot access on their own. Again, the plane is simply a tool for transporting the patient to the care – but it is a very special tool. Wings of Hope customizes its MAT planes as air ambulances, specially equipped with stretchers and medical equipment to accommodate even those patients who cannot safely fly in standard aircraft. The MAT Program, which is supported by 37 volunteer pilots, serves more than 800 patients annually.

Wings of Hope was founded in 1962 by four aviation business leaders with a simple mission: to help the poor. Since then, the charity has grown from one plane helping one nurse serving poor women and children in Kenya to 158 planes and more than 3,000 volunteers serving the poor in 47 countries. But the mission has not changed.

"We help our fellow man, because it's the right thing to do," says Clements.

Find out more about Wings of Hope at **[www.wings-of-hope.org](http://www.wings-of-hope.org)**.

*In our Flying Matters series, we focus on the great work being done by aviation-related non-profits and charitable organizations. To help contribute to our series with your organization, please contact us at **[shayla.silva@bonniercorp.com](mailto:shayla.silva@bonniercorp.com)**.*

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