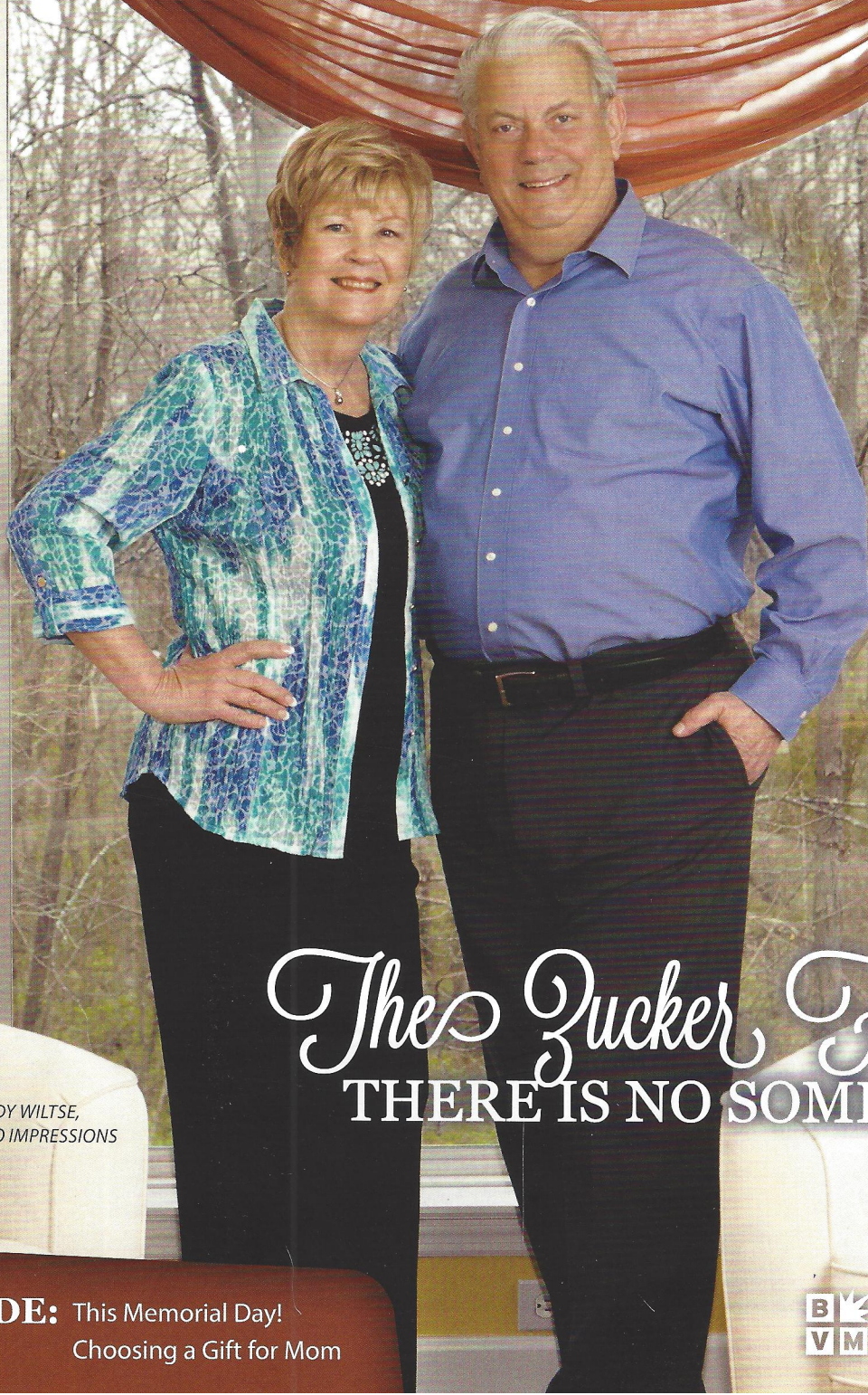


# LAKE ST. LOUIS *Neighbors*

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*The Zucker Family*  
THERE IS NO SOMEDAY

PHOTO BY CINDY WILTSE,  
CINDY'S PHOTO IMPRESSIONS

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Choosing a Gift for Mom



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# MIKE MCCOMBS: *Jack of All Trades*

By Carol Enright, Wings of Hope

Mike McCombs and his wife, Linda, have lived in Lake St. Louis since 1971—or, as Mike says, “since before there was water in the lake.”



They raised their two daughters here. The girls attended Wentzville schools, and the family spent many years living on Dauphine. Now, Mike and Linda live on Harbor Point Court. Linda retired after 33 years working for Drury Hotels, most recently as VP of Human Resources and Marketing. She still gets called to handle special projects and is currently helping research a history of the Drury Inn. Linda is a key source for the book as she started with the chain when it was just four hotels.



Through the years, Mike has worked in the automotive, home remodeling and aircraft industries. For the past 8-9 years, Mike has volunteered for Wings of Hope, an aviation nonprofit headquartered at Spirit of St. Louis Airport in Chesterfield. Mike's ability to fix almost anything mechanical and build anything from scratch has been a godsend to the organization.

“I like to say I started doing this (repair work) when I was 14, because my dad would buy old houses, particularly unimproved, which means no bathroom. Then he would use slave labor to fix them up and sell them,” Mike recalls.

Wings of Hope is best known locally for its medical air transport program. The charity also has a long history—more than 50 years—helping the poor in developing nations. Mike has traveled to several countries on humanitarian missions with Wings of Hope. His first trip was to the Amazon rainforest region of Ecuador.

“The villages have one big cooking area,” Mike explains. “People will bring food to make a meal and take some home for lunch. The school eats out of that pot, too.”

Mike was part of a crew that built a water system and a concrete cooking station to replace the hodgepodge of rocks and logs the villagers had been using. Mike also traveled to Ecuador on trips that involved flying teams of doctors and dentists into villages to provide much needed health care.

“We started out with volunteer American medical teams; then, I gradually worked with their Department of Health until they supplied their own doctors and dentists,” says Mike. “I felt that that was one of my accomplishments: making them aware of their own responsibilities to their own people.”

This is actually a core philosophy of Wings of Hope: to help people in need achieve self-sufficiency.

Then came a sustainable food project.

“We would give each family 10 chickens at a time and ask them not to eat them for three generations or 50 chickens, whichever came first,” says Mike.

Not all villagers caught on to the “sustainable” part of the project.

When the Wings of Hope crew would check on their progress, Mike remembers some saying, “they tasted good; when are you bringing more?”

Mike has put his handyman skills to work for Wings of Hope in several countries.

“In Guyana, we repaired windmills that the government had given to these remote schools but had never attended to,” Mike says. “Of the 26 windmills in this one district, 23 of them did not work.”

The windmills were used to pump water out of wells in the savannah. After three trips, including one three-week trek driving between villages on “traces of roads,” Mike's team had repaired 23 windmills.

In 2012, Mike traveled to Cambodia to oversee the building of a library funded by a Wings of Hope partner in support of an education program. Mike's job was “protecting the donor's interest” by making sure the local contractor delivered what was promised.

Mike spent much of 2013 leading a team of volunteers in retrofitting a pair of donated diesel busses into mobile medical units to provide medical care to people in Myanmar.

“That year (2013), I spent 190 days at Wings of Hope,” says Mike.

This past fall, Mike traveled to Myanmar to make sure the busses, which had been shipped to the country earlier in 2015, were in good working order. Although Mike and Linda have traveled the world—including trips to Africa, China, Europe and New Zealand—this was the first time Linda joined him on a Wings of Hope trip.

“I had to assure her that we would not be sleeping on the ground,” Mike chuckled.

Mike says the highlight of his work with Wings of Hope is “probably getting to go into the jungle.”

“It's a great conversation starter to say, ‘I was in the Amazonian jungle last week.’ And it's good feeling to know that you've started the process of improvement for a certain group of people,” he reflects.

Mike says he has “failed at retirement three times” and now has a “remodel and fix it type business.”

“I have other retired guys that work with me. It's a good time killer for us,” he says.

When asked what prepared him to tackle such a diverse range of global projects for Wings of Hope, Mike says, “a lifetime of gaining experience.”

“I've owned businesses where I've had as many as 50 employees, three different times. I can direct a crew and manage a project,” he says.

For information on how you can get involved at Wings of Hope, check out [www.wingsofhope.ngo](http://www.wingsofhope.ngo) or call 636-537-1302. •



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