

## Champion of Underserved

# 22 years, 2,600 hours of volunteer work

By Amber Hair  
Staff Writer

When he was just 6 years old, Dr. Timothy Horita decided he wanted to become a doctor after he was in a severe car accident requiring surgery and three weeks in the hospital. During his recovery, Horita became fascinated with the work of his doctors and nurses.

"They came in groups and they were wearing white coats and they spoke in a language I barely understood, but realized they played a big role in me getting better," Horita said. "My mom saved a one-page picture I (did). It says, 'When I grow up, I want to be a doctor.'"

Today, 22 years of volunteering and mentorship outside of his day job have made Horita both a community leader and model healthcare provider for people who would otherwise be without it.

The Oxnard-based doctor is a partner physician in charge of adult primary care at Kaiser Permanente Oxnard. After work, Horita spends time at Westminster Free Clinic, a nonprofit, volunteer-based medical service clinic. The clinic aims to provide free healthcare for uninsured and low-income individuals and families in the area, according to Lisa Safaeinili, the clinic's executive director.

Horita has been volunteering as a family practice physician since 2000, accumulating more than 2,600 hours of volunteer time. He is also a mentor in the youth volunteer program that educates and pairs high school students interested in healthcare with volunteer professionals at the clinic. He has worked with hundreds of students over the years.

"Dr. Horita has been our most dedicated physician and an all-time favorite among our students," Safaeinili said. "He's serving at our clinic after his full day of work at Kaiser."

Horita emphasizes the value of education with the teen volunteers, himself a graduate from UC Davis and Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth. He has always liked the science-based practice of medicine.

"It's not something you can learn and then know what you're doing five or six years later because what you've learned has changed over time," Horita said. "It's constantly evolving so you have to be actively engaged in learning."

Horita also stresses the ability to change people's lives at the clinic with just a 20- or 30-minute interaction. Extending people's quality and quantity of life is one of the most rewarding aspects of volunteering at the clinic for him.

"We're really grateful to him and he's making a big difference," Safaeinili said. "Many of our students end up going on to become physicians...he's helping encourage the next generation to go into that field."

Horita even brought two of his three sons to volunteer at the clinic when they were in high school. The oldest is now a third-year medical student at UC San Diego.

Horita sees about 6-10 patients each clinic shift. Many are manual or field laborers. The physical demand of these jobs requires health care services as simple as cortisol injections, according to Horita.

"It's amazing how I can improve someone's quality of life with what I consider pretty simple skills that I've been doing for a long time," Horita said. "They don't require a lot of effort or expertise, but it makes a profound difference in their ability to work and enjoy life."

Horita speaks highly of his patients and cites some of his professional success to the clinic, which has helped him learn Spanish. Horita has not received formal Spanish training since high school, but is now medically fluent. He has passed proficiency and certification exams.

"I owe all of that to my work in the clinic," Horita said. "You try as much as you can to speak Spanish, and then if you get a word wrong, patients are more than happy to help you. So, it's kind of like free Spanish classes, in that respect."

In his professional job at Kaiser, Horita has a large



Dr. Timothy Horita works with patients at Westminster Free Clinic, a nonprofit, volunteer-based clinic.

monolingual panel because of his ability to speak Spanish.

"When there is a language barrier, a lot is left to guesswork or assumption which can make providing precise medical care much more difficult," Horita said. "I think they feel like they have a better relationship with their doctor who makes an effort to speak their language."

Outside of medicine, Horita enjoys reading about martial arts, cooking, 3D printing, flight simulators, virtual reality painting and constructing movie props. Horita is also very interested in making homemade pizza, having invested in a wood-fired oven and perfecting his pizza dough recipes down to science, just like his health care practice.

Today, Horita volunteers at the clinic about once a month. The gratitude he has for his fellow volunteers and patients is clear.

"The patients are so appreciative that it gets me excited about practicing medicine. I feel very fortunate that I got to," Horita said. "I've always thought it's important to give back with the gift you get from it learning this art, this field."

## Westminster Free Clinic

By the numbers

- 12,000+** People served yearly
- 3,500+** Physician visits
- 600+** Volunteers
- 200+** Students training w/staff