

# Alarm over number of diabetes-related eye problems

By Kyle Christian

A New Jersey optometrist has said he is "surprised" at the high incidence of diabetes and other diseases affecting the eyes among residents.

Dr Brian Rosenblatt, of Rosenblatt Family Eye Care Associates, said about 15 per cent of the people he saw at the Gray's Farm Clinic were living with diabetes which affects the vision.

"There is a very high percentage of patients here that have diabetes in the adult population, and there is also a very high incidence of glaucoma which is a blinding eye disease that has no symptomatology," Dr Rosenblatt said.

Dr Rosenblatt is in Antigua as part of the Gift of Sight programme organised by non-profit organisation Sidewalk University. The programme is providing free eye examinations and corrective lenses to primary schoolchildren at the Bolans, Potters and Freetown primary schools between November 7 and 14.

In addition, the team will evaluate the current state of eye care clinic facilities for equipment needs and provide support to improve their operations. Training will also be provided to teachers and nurses so they can help identify children with early symptoms related to low vision, according to a government press release.

"It's been very rewarding. We hope that we had the impact on the students and at the clinic that we were intending to deliver," Rosenblatt told OBSERVER Media. "Our whole mission was to come, volunteer our



New Jersey optometrists examine two female residents during a visit to the Gray's Farm clinic, yesterday. Dr Brian Rosenblatt, along with a team of specialists, are providing free eye care to a number of students and residents as part of the 'Gift of Sight' programme running from November 7 to 14. (Photo by Eustace Samuel/OBSERVER Media)

time, and give our services to the people of Antigua who needed it, especially the children."

After seeing about 400 people up to yesterday, Rosenblatt said he was also surprised by the distribution of vision problems on the island.

"What we are finding is that most of the young children, about 20 per cent, are near-sighted, and the adults are all far-sighted," he said.

"We are going to have a full statistical report once we get back and evaluate what we have done," he promised.

The Gift of Sight committee, chaired by Laura Gaines, also includes Rosenblatt, Beth Rosenblatt, optometrist; Violet Potter, nurse; Deborah Sollod, nurse; Christopher Beyer, optician; and Gladwin Francis, volunteer.

The mission to Antigua was completely self-funded, according to Rosenblatt, who said the volunteers paid their own way. He said that Conrad Andy Howell, Sidewalk University's presi-

dent, is making arrangements to access funding to expand the project to other locations.

"This is our pilot programme; this is the programme that allows us to say 'okay this is what we were able to offer,'" Rosenblatt said. "Hopefully, there would be other areas interested in utilising our services and it would be helpful if we could get some funding."

The Gift of Sight volunteers provided services at Bolans Primary School last Thursday, Potters Primary yesterday, and will be at Freetown Primary today.

Rosenblatt said the response from the communities they visited and beyond has been outstanding.

"We were on the *Good Morning Antigua* show, and

everyone there was incredibly gracious for the service we provided to the people of Antigua. The people within the clinics that we have seen, the schoolchildren, it's been fantastic," he said.

The free eyeglasses were provided by Tony Braves, of Sans Pareil Inc, an eyeglass frame manufacturer headquartered in Coral Springs, Florida.

Sidewalk University's mission is to develop people to become leaders in their communities. The charitable organisation carries out its mission through a variety of means, including an assortment of educational and cultural programmes, which seek to expand the horizons of people and give them the skill sets they need to lead successful and productive lives.

## PRESIDENT'S BANQUET

Antigua & Barbuda Trade Union Congress will host its annual President's Banquet and Awards Ceremony on November 24, 7 pm at Sandals Resort. Tickets are available at Super Power, Ayoushe and from members of the congress.