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The Boone family – Joy, Sarah, Tom and Edgar – on a short-term mission in Denali, Alaska, two years ago

**EXCELA HEALTH FAMILY PHYSICIANS LEAVE
PENNSYLVANIA PRACTICE FOR INDIAN RESERVATION CLINIC**

GREENSBURG, PA, February 21, 2012... Family physicians Edgar and Joy Boone have always approached patient care from a physical, emotional and spiritual perspective. It is the latter influence that has weighed most heavily on their recent decision to join the Indian Health Service.

March 1, the Boones will turn over their 20-year practice in Herminie to Excelsa Health family physicians Ken and Keith Szekely. Later in the month, they will resettle in Whiteriver, AZ, where they will help to care for the 20,000-member White Mountain Apache tribe.

“It has long been our desire to serve the underprivileged and needy Native American population in a way that is both spiritually and physically satisfying,” said Dr. Joy Boone, 54. “Even before we married we talked about mission work. We believe this is what we are meant to do.”

Joy Boone’s family, members of Norwin Christian Church, hosted missionaries in their home during her growing-up years. More recently, the doctors and their children participated in a variety of short-term mission projects – ranging from a soup kitchen on Pittsburgh’s North Side to medical work in Alaska and Mexico and a building project for another Apache tribe. Understandably, it’s the medical clinic rather than the soup kitchen or the home blitz build, that holds the greatest appeal.

“We know this is the right decision,” said Dr. Edgar Boone, 56. “But it’s a big step to give up an established practice and longtime relationships, leave our church and family behind.”

The move is easier with the Boones’ children in college – their son, Tom, is in his second year of medical school at the University of Cincinnati and their daughter, Sarah, is pursuing graduate studies in physical therapy at Bellarmine University in Louisville. The doctors are hopeful their children will choose to complete rotations at the reservation hospital. They may also be a destination for members of the Norwin Christian Church who are interested in learning more about how to support this unique population.

The experience is sure to be more challenging medically than the Boones’ current practice. Located an hour from the nearest community hospital, and four hours from a tertiary center in Phoenix, the Indian Health Service clinic often functions as an emergency room. That means the Boones will be refreshing their skills in advanced trauma life support and obstetrics. Although Dr. Joy Boone taught in the UPMC McKeesport Family Medicine Residency Program from 2007 to 2009, she hasn’t delivered a baby in about 25 years. More typically, the Boones can expect to treat the chronic conditions that are complicated by poverty – diabetes, alcoholism, infectious diseases and early mortality - with the occasional scorpion and snake bite that will require some training not usual for Pennsylvania.

While the Boones have signed a two-year contract, they expect the assignment to last much longer. “The hospital has a close medical staff, and some of the physicians have been there 15 or 20 years,” said Dr. Edgar Boone. “This is a stable environment and I can see us remaining there for the rest of our working years, but we will remain open to where God is leading.”

The Boones will live on the reservation in a compound adjacent to the hospital while waiting for their Pennsylvania home to sell. In time they anticipate moving closer to the remote clinic they will serve in Cibecue, a village of about 1,500 Native Americans located an hour away from the main clinic and hospital.

The doctors also expect to have more free time for social ministry: tutoring, teaching, or helping with other outreach. As government employees, their workday will

be more defined. “You can’t work outside the clinic hours,” explained Dr. Edgar Boone. “In Pennsylvania we’re so busy seeing patients during the day that our evenings and weekends have been devoted to catching up on paperwork. That left little time for anything else.”