



Easley on the medical practicum to Guatemala in January 2025.



A FULL CIRCLE JOURNEY

Easley starts and ends career on medical practicum

BY CHLOE LECKRONE '22

A trip to Panama in 1982 transformed **Jeff Easley's** '83 life. A biology-chemistry major, Easley grew up in a small farm town about 45 minutes from North Manchester. He had heard great things about Manchester College's reputation for its science programs, primarily from his family's doctor, **Ed Hollenberg '48**, who graduated from Manchester and was a mentor for Easley. It was Dr. Hollenberg who inspired Easley to pursue medicine and attend Manchester.

During Easley's sophomore year at Manchester, **Ed Miller '56**, professor of chemistry, launched a tradition that has lasted decades and changed the lives of so many Manchester students—the medical practicum. A group of science



students traveled to Central America with Miller to serve the local communities by providing vital medical care.

“It really is Ed Miller’s legacy. I don’t know that he could have imagined just how much it would take hold and how ingrained it has become in the Manchester experience.”

Though he did not participate in that inaugural trip, he knew he wanted to join the next one. In January 1982, Easley went to Panama and had his first true experience in patient care.

“I knew I wanted to go into medicine, but at the same time, I had never experienced any kind of care of patients,” he said. “And this completely solidified everything I wanted to do in my life. It made a huge impact on what I wanted to do and who I wanted to become.”

Since graduating from Manchester in 1983, Easley joined the practicum three more times. First in 2014 to Nicaragua, then in 2023 and 2025 to Guatemala. He even led his own trips to Haiti for 10 years as a faculty member at the University of St. Francis in Fort Wayne, after 25 years of practice in Ohio.

“I really love being with the students, teaching them how to listen to a heart, how to look at ears, just those simple things.” Something that has remained constant about the program for more than four decades is the immersive experience it provides. “You’re eating authentic food, you’re living amongst your constituents, the people you see at the clinic, and you see what their life is like.”

One change—for the better—that Easley has noticed is the significant increase in the number of participants in recent years. On his first trip, the small group consisted mainly of pre-med students. Now, there are almost always multiple providers from a much wider range of disciplines, including nurse practitioners, pharmacists, dental hygienists, midwives, physician’s assistants, and even a few veterinarians.

This past January, Easley made the decision to travel to Guatemala with the program and end his medical career the same way he started it. He retired from teaching in December 2024.

“My first experience with patients was in Panama, so I wanted to finish by taking care of patients on the medical practicum,” Easley said. “It speaks volumes of what the University is all about. I’ve had a tiny part in it over the decades, but I’ve cherished it.”

At Homecoming this fall, Easley will accept the Alumni Honor Award, the highest recognition the Alumni Association can bestow on a graduate of Manchester University.

Trips have been made to Panama, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. Jeff Osborne, professor of chemistry and director of biology-chemistry, has led the program for nearly 18 years. January 2026 will mark Manchester’s 40th medical practicum. ▼



LEFT: Easley with Panamanian locals in 1982. RIGHT: The second-ever medical practicum group in Panama.

