Leading nearly 500 mission trips in 56 countries during his career, from Mexico to Africa, Southeast Asia and the Amazon jungle, Dr. Ron Lamb is the American Dental Association’s (ADA) 2012 Humanitarian Award recipient. He was presented with the award Oct. 18 during the ADA’s Annual Session in San Francisco.

Lamb has dedicated his life to helping those in need worldwide by providing dental care and collecting and distributing millions of dollars worth of dental equipment and supplies to thousands of international volunteer teams.

“I was struck by Dr. Lamb’s humility when I informed him of the decision of the board of trustees to bestow this honor upon him,” said Dr. William R. Calnon, ADA president. “It was obvious that his actions are a result of a true love for his fellow man. As World Dental Relief’s home page states, ‘Dr. Ron Lamb has touched the hearts and lives of people throughout the world with compassionate dental care.’ His many contributions make him a perfect choice for the ADA Humanitarian Award.”

After graduating from dental school in 1974, Lamb balanced his full-time dental practice by organizing and leading several mission trips to Mexico each year. He closed his practice in 1991 and began using the space for receiving and distributing supplies for his charitable dental organization, World Dental Relief.

“We wanted to try doing mission work for a solid year without the practice. We were going to depend upon donations and if we made it one year then we would do a second and third year. If we made it three years living on donations, then we would not go back into private practice. We cut the financial lifelines of our private practice, and it was a risk. But we have completed our 20th year of full-time service. Altogether, we have been doing this sort of work for 35 years.”

Through World Dental Relief, he has also provided 5,291 medical and dental teams with more than $15 million worth of supplies. World Dental Relief has also taken on special projects, including coordinating donations and shipping of dental equipment and a three-year cache of supplies needed to launch a dental school in Ethiopia. The organization has equipped more than 60 dental clinics and five prosthetic labs internationally.

Lamb has also designed and created portable dental equipment and provided tons of supplies for use by relief agencies responding to disasters, including the Mission of Mercy after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 and the earthquake in Haiti in 2010.

Lamb’s wife, Pam, and their children Tina and Bobby not only support his charitable endeavors, they also work for World Dental Relief.

Established in 2007, the ADA Humanitarian Award recognizes individual volunteer commitment and leadership that has had a broad impact on oral health and the improvement of the human condition. The award is bestowed on an ADA member dentist who has contributed at least 10 years to alleviate human suffering, demonstrated significant leadership, served as an inspiration to others and established a legacy that is of ongoing value and benefit to those in need in the U.S. and abroad. The award includes a $5,000 donation to a charity of the recipient’s choice.