

Manheim veteran gets samaritan award for work in Vietnam**Intelligencer Journal**Published: Nov 19, 2008
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Michael Dobson, left, presents the 2008 Samaritan Medal for Humanitarian Achievement and Peace and a c...(more)

1 of 1

A Vietnam War veteran and subsequent champion of Vietnamese children received an international humanitarian award Tuesday afternoon at The Gathering Place in Mount Joy.

Paul Pinkerton of Manheim and his charity, Paul's Kids, were awarded the Samaritan Medal for Humanitarian Achievement and Peace for their work with Vietnamese children.

The Samaritan Medal was established by an interfaith group representing various branches of the Abrahamic tradition: Israelite Samaritan, Jewish, Christian and Muslim.

Honorees are selected for distinguished service to humanity, especially in the cause of peace.

Candidates for the Samaritan Medal must demonstrate through their lives and actions the spirit of the Good Samaritan.

"As the only community in the Middle East whose members enjoy good relations with all sides, the

Samaritan people of the Holy Land invite all people of good will to join in this vital work," a brochure about the Samaritan Medal Foundation states. The current population of Israelite Samaritans is 712, down from more than 1 million about 1,500 years ago.

In addition to Pinkerton and Paul's Kids, 2008 honorees include Shimon Peres, president of Israel; Munib al-Masri, a candidate for prime minister of a Palestinian Authority unity government; and Ghassan al Shaq'ah, mayor of Nablus in the West Bank for nearly 20 years.

Pinkerton, who had been notified of his award late last year, was presented with it Tuesday when Samaritan Benyamin Tsedaka, chairman of the Samaritan Medal Foundation committee, was in the United States as part of his world tour.

Pinkerton served with the U.S. Army from July 1968 to July 1969. He was assigned to the 5th Division at the Con Thien combat base in the Demilitarized Zone in Vietnam for six months. He then was assigned to the 1st Division in Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City, and Song Be for six months.

Like many combat vets, Pinkerton returned home from the frontlines of the war bitter as a result of what he had seen and experienced. He was haunted by the images of dead children from the body counts he had conducted.

He channeled that anger in 1987 into the prisoner-of-war/missing-in-action, or POW-MIA, issue. He went back to Vietnam in January 1990 to look for missing soldiers and again in July of the same year to make a film for PBS about missing people. In 1993, Pinkerton located the remains of five missing Americans.

In 1995, Pinkerton, his wife, Sandra, and 1-year-old daughter Hannah, who is now 15, visited Vietnamese orphanages.

In 1997, the Pinkertons adopted then-7-month-old Isaiah. Because there were no programs that study the home life of those wishing to adopt from Vietnam, the Pinkertons were asked to start a program.

For the next 11 years, the Pinkertons worked with Adoptions from the Heart and several other small adoption agencies, escorting families to Vietnam. They helped with 400 adoptions, including Angelina Jolie's adoption of Pax Thien in 2007.

The Pinkertons now have adopted three special-needs Vietnamese children: Isaiah, now 12, is legally blind; Deborah, 9, has juvenile idiopathic arthritis; and Noah, 7, has autism.

Two years ago, Pinkerton started the Paul's Kids foundation to help children in Vietnamese orphanages who aren't likely to be adopted.

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The foundation has expanded to help all children in need in Vietnam. Scholarships have been given to almost 300 children to pay for their schooling and books. The foundation also built a soccer field in a remote village. It paid for 11 open-heart surgeries that helped save children who would not have survived without the surgery.

"There are still a lot more — 2,000 — on the waiting list. This is a big need," Pinkerton said.

In addition, Paul's Kids built four physical-therapy rooms in rehab hospitals and purchased rehab equipment for them. It is now working to get two more physical-therapy rooms built.

Along with the Samaritan award's silver medal, Paul's Kids received a check for \$2,000, which Pinkerton said probably would be put toward more heart surgeries, because a heart surgery in Vietnam is fairly inexpensive, costing between \$1,500 and \$3,500.

Phyllis Singer, widow of the Rev. James Miller Singer, also posthumously received her husband's 2007 Samaritan Medal at The Gathering Place on Tuesday.

Singer is noted for keeping his Washington, D.C., Lutheran church open, at great personal risk and the risk of his congregation, during the 1968 riots that followed the Rev. Martin Luther King's assassination so that those who lost their homes could take refuge. The congregation fed 10,000 and clothed 5,000 people.

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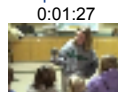
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