

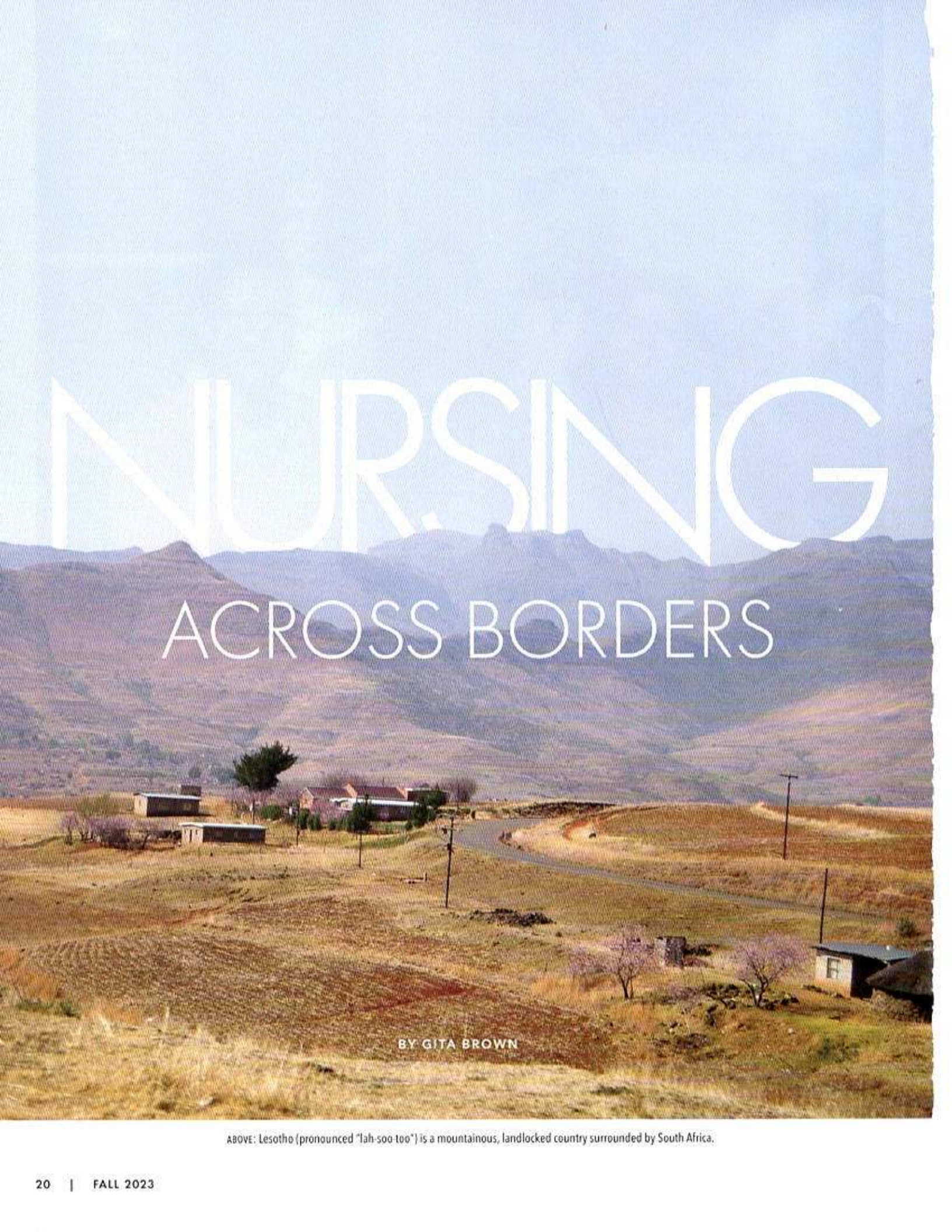
# RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

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## All In

Boosting adult learners &  
launching new initiatives, RIC  
is moving the state forward

A landscape photograph of a mountainous region. The foreground shows a dirt road winding through a valley with sparse, dry vegetation and a few small buildings. The middle ground features rolling hills and a winding road. The background consists of large, rugged mountains under a clear blue sky. The text 'NURSING' is overlaid in large white letters across the top, and 'ACROSS BORDERS' is overlaid in smaller white letters below it.

# NURSING

## ACROSS BORDERS

BY GITA BROWN

ABOVE: Lesotho (pronounced "lah-soo-too") is a mountainous, landlocked country surrounded by South Africa.

HAITIAN  
HUMANITARIAN  
NETWORK

The village of Beaulieu is an area so remote that you can't find it on a map. Situated in Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the world and the most mountainous in the Caribbean, village huts are spread out throughout the mountainsides, rather than centrally located in a compound. The people of Beaulieu have no electricity, safe drinking water, public transportation, schools or hospitals.

Yet somewhere hidden in the mountainous terrain is a clinic co-founded and directed by Jocelyne de Gouvenain '11 B.S.N., '17 M.S.N., who grew up in Beaulieu and is now a doctoral student and assistant professor of nursing at Rhode Island College. Her husband, retired RIC Professor of Biology Roland de Gouvenain, is the other co-founder, serving in a supportive role.

For the past 20 years, their clinic has been a lifeline for the villagers. Called the Erline and Armelle Clinic after Jocelyn's two aunts, this facility provides primary care, preventative care and community health education.

To get to the clinic, people trek on foot or by donkey for miles. The villagers are mostly subsistence farmers, although only one-fifth of Haiti's land is considered suitable for growing crops due to soil erosion and the absence of irrigation. Thus, more than half of the country's food, including 80 percent of its rice, is imported. Yet these are a rugged people. They are used to making the most out of a little.

It was the villagers who built the clinic, funded by the de Gouvenain's nonprofit - the Haitian Humanitarian Network (HHN). Women and children carried each foundation rock and countless buckets of water



Assistant Professor of Nursing Jocelyne de Gouvenain.

on their heads up the mountain to the men who made bricks from the material and constructed the building.

Founded in 2003, the first iteration of the Erline and Armelle Clinic was a one-room hut Jocelyn rented from a village woman for \$12 a month. In 2007 HHN donations paid for the construction of a three-room building. The current building, completed in 2010, contains five rooms: a waiting room, two exam rooms, a pharmacy and an office.

Staffed by four nurses, two part-time doctors and an administrator/pharmacist, the clinic treats an average of 350 patients a month, who pay 25 gourdes (the equivalent of 25 cents in U.S. currency). Those who can't afford to pay are seen for free.

"In the 20 years since it was founded, our clinic has gone beyond my expectations and the expectations of the villagers," Jocelyne says.

She opened the clinic after her aunt hemorrhaged to death after giving birth. "At the time, the village didn't have any access



RIGHT: The original clinic - a rented shed.

LEFT: The current clinic, designed by the HHN board president Don Dinsmore and built by Jocelyne's brother with other villagers, includes a waiting room, two exam rooms, a pharmacy and an office.



The village of Beaulieu is an area so remote that you can't find it on a map and huts are spread out throughout the mountainsides



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—ASSISTANT PROFESSOR  
JOCELYNE DE GOUVENAIN

to healthcare," Jocelyne says. "So, they carried my aunt on a stretcher to the next village where there was a clinic, but by the time they got there, she had bled to death. She was 35 years old. Her name was Erline Hilaire. I wasn't in the village when she died because I was studying nursing in another village. My aunt was instrumental in sending me food, clothing and anything else I needed to go to school. She died before I could use my learning to help her. With the blessings of the village elders, I decided to build a clinic in our village to decrease maternal and infant mortality."

The clinic's other namesake is her husband's aunt - Armelle - who also supported Jocelyne's nursing studies. "Aunt Armelle's objective," she said, "was to help me with my education so I could help my people."

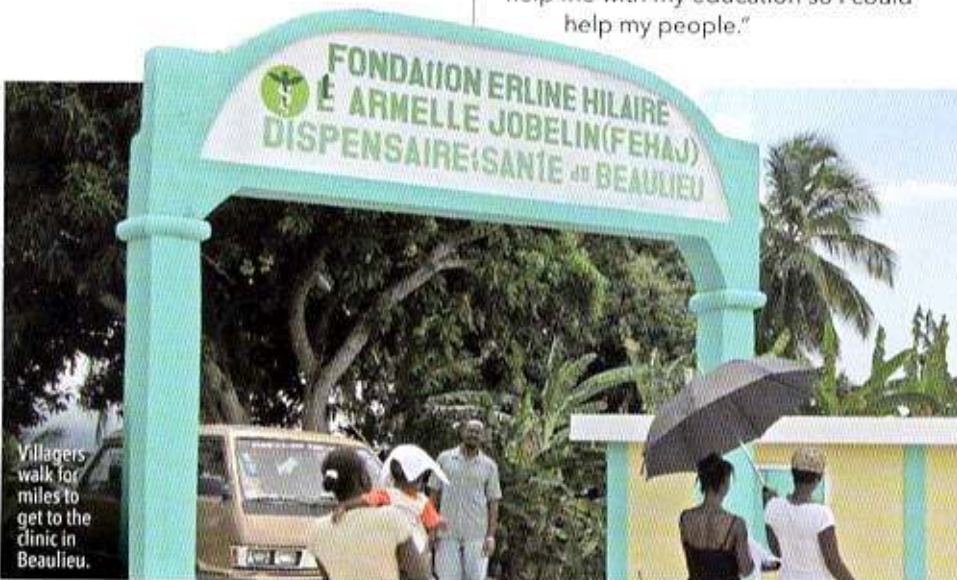
"Ultimately, it was friends in the United States - nurses, doctors, engineers - who trusted me enough to invest their time, their energy and their money to help me get the clinic off the ground," Jocelyne says. "The current president of HHN, Donald Dinsmore, and his wife, Sue, along with other early supporters, such as Dr. Thomas Gorin, devoted 20 years of their life to support the building and operation of the clinic. Though I initiated the clinic, it wouldn't have happened without them."

With the creation of HHN, a 501(1)(c)(3) non-profit, the clinic has been able to raise funds to keep its operations going. HHN is an all-volunteer organization, with 100 percent of donations going directly to the clinic.

In 2015 Joanne Costello, RIC professor of nursing, met with Jocelyne.

"Jocelyne was in our master's degree program, specializing in population and public health nursing," Costello says. "I was so impressed by the work she was doing through HHN. I wanted our students to learn more about global health. At the time, the School of Nursing didn't have a global health program."

Costello initiated a partnership between HHN and the Zvart Onanian School of Nursing. From 2015-2019 students from all four of RIC's graduate nursing programs accompanied Jocelyne once or twice a year to Haiti to work in the clinic. Costello eventually offered the experience as a for-credit, elective course titled NURS 521: Global Health Experience: Haiti."



Villagers walk for miles to get to the clinic in Beaulieu.

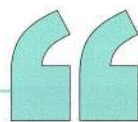
"I was part of the first student group to go to Haiti," says Katie Cherenzia M.S.N. '17 "Little did I know how profoundly it would impact my life and my future."

Cherenzia describes it as "a fully immersive experience in that we lived like the villagers. We didn't have electricity, we used buckets of water to take showers and Jocelyne did all the cooking. Before flying out to Haiti, I packed a suitcase full of donated school supplies to bring to the children in the village. At night, when the clinic was closed, children would come wanting to learn English. I made lifelong friends and have been able to stay involved with HHN by joining the board of directors, where I am currently vice president."

"RIC nursing students also provided public health education," says Costello, "such as disaster preparedness training in a country known for its severe hurricanes and earthquakes."

HHN funds the rebuilding of homes after natural disasters and partners with Hope for Haiti, Project Hope and Caritas, who have been able to share their medical supplies, personnel and/or medicines with the clinic when there are political or natural disasters. HHN also established the Erline and Armelle Foundation to provide Beaulieu children with scholarships to attend primary school in the neighboring village.

"Beaulieu has gone from being a place that no one heard of to a place where if you



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—PROFESSOR JOANNE COSTELLO

say, 'Beaulieu,' people know it because of the clinic," Jocelyne says. "Our success has been a team effort. We are here because of all our friends in the U.S. On behalf of the people of Beaulieu, we are very grateful." 🙏

*Jocelyne de Gouvenain is a recipient of the 2023 Alumni Honor Roll Award for Nursing. She is currently a RIC doctoral student and assistant professor of adult health nursing at Rhode Island College. She also works per diem at Rhode Island Hospital. Due to civil unrest, NURS 521 has been suspended. More information on the Erline and Armelle Clinic can be found on the Haitian Humanitarian Network website at [haitianclinic.org](http://haitianclinic.org).*



LEFT: Coronary heart disease is the leading cause of death in Haiti. Here, a nurse at the clinic checks a patient's blood pressure.

ABOVE: The Erline and Armelle Clinic pharmacy.