

Like the man in the song, Ken Hackett has been everywhere

✘ Ken Hackett and I were passing time at Miami International Airport Oct. 23, waiting for a connection to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, when I asked how many nations he had visited.

“It’s easier,” he said, “to list the ones I haven’t been to.”

Hackett, a Peace Corps veteran, faithful employee of Baltimore-based Catholic Relief Services since 1972 and its president since 1993, does get around.

In the Western Hemisphere, he has never been to Belize, Chile or Peru. In Africa, he has not set foot in Gabon and Namibia. In Europe, he has never seen Azerbaijan, what was once part of the Soviet Union. He hasn’t seen much of the Himalayas, as his passport still lacks stamps from Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet.

“There’s another one in Asia I haven’t been too, can’t remember the name, king married a commoner, the country has a very high standard of living,” Hackett said. “When I had responsibility for the Pacific, I couldn’t figure out how to get from Kiribati to Tuvalu without taking a week, so there were places there I didn’t get to either.”

On what was expected to be his last overseas field trip, Hackett spent one hot morning hiking through a Port-au-Prince neighborhood CRS is helping stabilize, and the same afternoon was part of a delegation that visited the first lady of Haiti, Sophia Martelly. One CRS staffer asked how he kept his suit jacket fresh.

“Hang it in the bathroom when you’re showering,” he said. “Removes the wrinkles.”