

Locals preparing for Nicaraguan mission trip



By Mike Pickford

A group of local residents are preparing for the adventure of a lifetime as they count down the days until they join a provincial church group on an important mission trip to Nicaragua.

Widely regarded as one of the poorest countries on the western hemisphere, the impoverished Central American nation has become a popular destination for individuals looking to lend a helping hand to those who need it most. For Hal Gillett, it was the opportunity to get out and see the world that drew him into the trip.

To be joined by his two teenaged sons Derek and Ryan, Mr. Gillett said he's always been fascinated with the idea of joining a mission trip and when the opportunity arose for his family and three other members from High County United Church in Mono to get involved, he didn't want to let the chance pass him by.

"This idea about heading out on a mission trip and helping out a group of people that truly need it has always interested me and been a bit of a goal of mine and so when we first caught wind of this we were all very interested," Mr. Gillett said.

Organized by the Northern Waters Presbytery, the collective group of 14 people will travel to the rural community of Puerto Cabezas. Located on the northeast coast of Nicaragua, the community of 70,000 is considered to be one of the poorest regions in the country.

"While there are a lot of missions that head down to Nicaragua, they don't usually travel to the eastern side of the country. It's more remote and much more difficult to get to. After flying into Managua (Nicaragua's capital), we have to take another flight over the mountains so it will be interesting to see what it's like down there," Mr. Gillett said.

The group departs from Toronto on July 4, returning to Canada on July 15. While they won't be directly participating in a specific build or project, they plan to help out the local residents in whatever way they can. During the trip they plan to visit an orphanage, take in a boat trip to a fishing village, go on a hike to a volcano and stop over at a local prison so as to "spread the spirit of God" amongst inmates.

"We're going to be taking medical supplies down with us, just the basics like masks, gloves, bandages, gauze, things like that. Then we'll have school supplies, craft supplies, sports supplies. They're big into baseball and soccer down there, so it will be nice to be able to give them something they can have fun with," Mr. Gillett noted. "Then we're also fundraising to purchase sheet metal so that the locals can use that to install new roofs on structures."

He added, "But we'll be having a little fun too. We'll be heading to different places and meeting different people. Maybe swim in the Pacific a little. It will be a great adventure."

Each individual making the trip has been tasked with raising \$3,100, which will go towards travel expenses and funding much of the supplies the group is taking with them. One of the youngest members of the mission is 14-year-old Megan Buchanan. Speaking to the Citizen, she said she was excited to experience "a whole new way of life" down in Nicaragua.

"We saw a presentation last year about youth mission trips and that really moved me and made me start thinking about possibly getting involved in one," Ms. Buchanan said. "I've heard that if you visit a place completely different from where you live it will completely change your life, open your eyes and give you a better insight into the world and maybe change you as a person."

She added, "I love meeting new people, so I'm excited to head down there and say hi to as many people as possible. I expect, once I've returned to Canada, I'll have a new perspective on everything I have in my life and how fortunate I am."

It's a similar story for Mr. Gillett, who says he hopes his two sons will gain a perspective for how different life is for people overseas.

?I hope my boys will learn how good they have it here in a country where you can get almost anything you want. In a country like Nicaragua, the people have almost nothing, but they're still incredibly happy individuals. The fact that they're poor isn't a huge obstacle to them? They love their lives and they work hard.?

The group will continue its fundraising efforts right up until departure. For more information, or to donate you can contact the church by calling 519-941-0972 or by emailing highcountryunited@auracom.com.