



From left, Carol Tanney, Rachel Hoekstra and Cathy DeSouza pose with volunteers and dresses created for donation by the Sew n'Sews.

TRAVELING WITH A PURPOSE

By Sally Smid

While Christmas is a time of giving, for many in the area, the spirit of giving seems to last all year, through a variety of projects and travel opportunities. While lots of local residents escape to warmer weather each winter, many may not be aware of ways in which they could make a difference in the needy areas surrounding their destinations. Perhaps some have even felt sadness in realizing such contrasts. Numerous area travelers have found ways to make a difference in a variety of ways. It can be as easy as taking an extra suitcase containing clothing, school supplies, toiletries or other needed items. Some airlines allow a "humanitarian bag" without charge. Pack with a Purpose at www.packforapurpose.org has a lot of information, including participants, what to pack, and drop-off places. Marsha Stadig of Brockville, has been involved with this program on numerous trips to Mexico, where she also visited a recipient school.

The Sew n'Sews who have met for 8 years at Centennial Road Church have been a big part of many such donations as well. Their mission statement is "to clothe a village one child at a time" and they have sent items to 15 different countries. This group of seamstresses meet weekly to sew clothing for needy children. "People planning trips contact us and we help arrange the donations of dresses, short sets, blankets and more" explained organizer Rachel Hoekstra. "Materials are often donated and we all enjoy socializing. It is so rewarding to know that our work helps so many needy young ones!"

Brian and Sherrie Davis of Lyn have been spending winters in Mexico. They have also given of their time and skills in making an impact near their villa. They met Manuel and Marie, who were living in very poor living conditions. They helped do some remodeling and painting and purchased bedding and kitchen items for them. While there were language barriers, it seems that

the concern, compassion and friendship experienced went beyond words. A group from their villa even helped replace Manuel's stolen boat motor to restore his fishing job. "Everything given is from our overflow," remarked Sherrie. They hope to help another couple this year and their friends are donating to help with the project. "We couldn't do it without that dream team!" Sherrie commented.

Martha and Rick Jackson, also go to Mexico each year. They have become quite involved in helping a school there, adding another dimension and enjoyment to their yearly trips. Perhaps it is easier to give to a project when the donors can see first hand that the help that is being given is directly benefiting those in need, without concern over large administration costs.

Local resident, Rita VanSpriel has been knitting Kenyan Dolls for many years, in order to raise funds for her mission trips to Kenya. Each doll is unique and can be given a name

by the donor before going to a child in Africa or being purchased and given as a gift to support her work there.

There are also others involved in what is more of a working vacation. Carol Tanney, a retired nurse, has long been involved in Project Reach Out's work in Ghana and has made many trips there with a variety of associates. "The needs are so great and everyone is so thankful for the small helps given," explains Carol. "Some may think that being there for such a short period wouldn't make much of a difference in people's lives, but who could say that to the mother whose baby would die from dehydration without proper medication, or to the family whose children might die from malaria when a three-day course of treatment kills the malaria parasite?"

PRO, now part of World Hope Canada, also has items available that make excellent Christmas gifts and certificates for alternate Christmas gifting. Many friends and family members would appreciate that a goat, a pig or more might be given to a needy family in their name. More information is available at www.worldhope.ca

Inspired by the commitment of a missionary couple, Jane and John Fournier and their son Matthew of Athens, travelled to Peru where they also took a vacation with a purpose. Matthew was connected with a sponsor child. It was a chance for them to see first hand the needs in that area, as well as a way for their son to better realize his many blessings and learn about sharing with others. They discovered that perhaps it would be better to bring money to buy needed items there which would also help the local economy. While they had anticipated making a change in the lives of Peruvians, they were the ones who had their lives changed. "Matthew has been to Disneyland and more, but he still says that Peru was his favourite vacation," reported his mother Jane. "There are so many ways to make a difference in people's lives right here in Canada," commented John. For him it may mean visiting with and encouraging a lonely, downhearted senior.

It is apparent that we don't need to travel out of our own neighbourhood to make a difference in the lives of others. Maybe it is helping to put together Christmas hampers, visiting a senior's home or serving at a community Christmas dinner. It is a time to be thankful for what we are blessed with and in turn give to others. That could just be the kind of stuff that makes for the merriest Christmas of all! LH



Top to Bottom: These photos speak volumes about the improvements made for Manuel and Maria in Mexico. Rita Van Spriel stands beside a display of her Kenyan Dolls which she has been creating for her work in Kenya.