

Volunteers enriched by Mexico experience



Adrienne Swanson (center) plays a game with Mexican children.

Often the giver is just as enriched by the experience as the recipient. So it was with two local girls and their chaperone who traveled to Mexico this summer as a part of a program sponsored by the Baker Diocese of the Catholic Church. Allison Halvorsen and Adrienne Swanson, both Ione, and their chaperone, Mary Ann Elguezabal, Heppner, traveled to Tijuana, Mexico, to aid a church community and came away with an appreciation and respect for the people there.

Adrienne and Allison first learned about the project at St. William's Church in Ione from several of their friends who had gone previously. Adrienne, who is a member of St. Williams and Allison, who is a member of Ione United Church of Christ, but who is almost as much at home at St. William's, each raised \$500 to be able to join the group.

The experience for the Morrow County trio began July 9, when they left Ione for Klamath Falls with Mary Ann in the driver's seat. Upon their arrival at Klamath Falls they met others who were to accompany them on their journey and set off by van to Tijuana. They stopped in San Francisco for a night's rest and a little sightseeing and then again in Los Angeles before arriving in Tijuana July 12.

The well-know volunteer project draws people from all over the world. "I didn't know this project was so famous," said Mary Ann, who added that volunteers came from Austria, Germany, Spain, Italy, France and New Zealand, as well as from all over the U.S. and ran the gamut from high school and college students to priests, nuns and physicians.

Once they arrived in Tijuana, the group stayed at a kind of boarding house. Each morning the volunteers dispersed to their various jobs, which ranged from cleaning up debris after construction, building fence and painting to helping at school and playing with the children.

Both Adrienne and Allison were amazed at the positive attitudes of the children, many of whom lived in extreme poverty. As with other local volunteers who had gone to Mexico, Allison and Adrienne commented that the people there had so little, but seemed so happy, while many young people in the U.S. have everything but happiness.

"It was cool to see how happy the kids were," said Adrienne. "You could please them just by playing with them. They have nothing and are happy and we have everything and are still not happy."

"You could see the border from the roof of our place," said Allison. "Houses were built right up to the fence, taking up every inch of space. The houses were about 10x12, like shacks. Most of the children came from tiny houses, like tin boxes, but they were clean and nice inside. They have burn barrels for water and the showers were outside--in the small houses they were more like buckets."

"We also went to a really nice house," added Adrienne. "There was a big difference between the houses. They were either one way or another. There was no middle class."

In Tijuana, Mary Ann was able to meet with a priest she had known in Nyssa, where she grew up. Father Valencia, who was in charge of several orphanages in Tijuana, had worked for a year as a substitute priest for the Baker Diocese in Nyssa. Father Valencia had previously invited her to come to Tijuana, but, says Mary Ann, "Never in my wildest



Allison Halvorsen calms a baby at a Tijuana orphanage.



Mary Ann Elguezabal, Allison Halvorsen and Adrienne Swanson prepare to leave for Mexico.

dreams did I ever think I would get down to visit him." Through Father Valencia, their group was able to visit three of the orphanages, which, says Mary Ann, were in a more middle class neighborhood than in the area where they worked. "It was nice to get that other view," she says. "It was good to see there is hope for the children."

The orphanages, which were clean and well kept, contrasted sharply with the life of many of the children they helped. "As Mother Teresa says, 'We can do no great things, we can only do small things with great love,'" says Mary Ann. "I had to keep repeating that to myself, because you could spend a lifetime working there and still not be done. The poverty is overwhelming. But, the spirit of the people is so positive. Their faith in God is so strong."

"Their religion means a lot to them and that was a big difference," echoed Adrienne. "Everyone had a picture of our Lady of Guadalupe. We saw that picture everywhere--in the houses, on the streets, in businesses--everywhere."

The girls were also surprised at the level of responsibility that circumstances demand of very young children there. One such child, around seven years old, was not only responsible for feeding, dressing and bathing his three year-old sister because of the parents' long work hours, but also doted on the little girl and worried over her well-being. While the younger children attended school at the church, the older children, 15-16 years old, became teachers. Some of the older children asked Adrienne and Allison to help them teach English to the younger children.

Adrienne says that Mary Ann, who is fluent in Spanish, was often a big help translating. "I told the kids that a smile is the

same in any language," laughed Mary Ann, who is of Irish descent and whose maiden name is Doherty. Mary Ann says she took Spanish in high school, but really learned the language (and sometimes, what not to say) as an 18-year-old bride living with her new husband, Juan, in Coahila in northeast Mexico.

While a smile may be the same, many other things are strikingly different. The girls found out the hard way that in Mexico, they could not flush the toilet paper down the toilet. They could not drink the water, nor rinse their toothbrushes off in it and couldn't even open their mouths during a shower. During an excursion to the beach, they discovered they couldn't wear tank tops, short shorts or two-piece bathing suits because of the more modest Mexican society.

While the experience gave the girls a big dose of compassion and tolerance, they also had a lot of fun and met some good friends during the marathon trek to Mexico and back. They amused themselves by playing games, visiting between the vans with walkie-talkies and just talking. "The long trip didn't bother us, because (living in the country) we were used to it," said Allison, "but the kids from the city just went nuts."

"Most of the other people in the van knew each other," she added. "We didn't know anyone, but by the time we got to Tijuana, we knew everyone."

Pool renovation meeting slated

A meeting concerning possible renovation of the former Heppner swimming pool site has been scheduled.

Anyone interested in participating in the project is invited to meet at the pool at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, September 21.

For more information, call Becky Breazeale, 676-5735.

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Appreciation dessert planned at Legion Hall



Jean Crowell (right) Legion Auxiliary secretary/treasurer with grandson Anthony Rietmann, and Jean Jepsen, Legion scholarship committee and Girls State.

Anyone who has read the children's story, "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie," knows that sometimes a small situation has a way of snowballing into a very big one.

Such it is with the Ione Legion Hall renovation project.

The project, which originally started out as a floor refinishing project, ended up something much greater indeed.

When contemplating refinishing the hall's floor, members at first planned to go around the existing old oil space heating system. But, at the urging of Legion Auxiliary member, Jean Jepsen, the old oil heating system was removed in order to do a more complete job on the floor.

However, what Jean and the Legion and Auxiliary members didn't count on was the condition of the chimney flues.

When the old system was removed, the flues were inspected and, consequently, condemned. The Legion then decided to replace the old system with new propane heaters.

The new heating system, in turn, prompted new insulation and windows to weatherize the building and retain the heat, a new electrical system and fans to circulate the air.

The Legion undertook an ambitious fund raising project to renovate the hall. Jepsen contacted L.J. "Jerry" McElligott's son, Vince, who is deputy director of development at Colorado State University, who helped them apply for a Meyer Memorial Trust grant.

Not only did they receive the grant, but the fund raising campaign was successful beyond their wildest dreams. The Legion not only had enough money for renovation of the floors, but also enough for a more extensive renovation project as well.

However, renovation of the hall has, in turn, resulted in an increase in insurance premiums required on the building.

"We just have a continuing problem of maintenance of the building," says McElligott, Past

Commander of the Ione American Legion Post #95. "We got it fixed up and we can't quit there. We have to keep going to keep it up as long as we can. We have been trying to maintain this for years, knowing it is a community building."

The hall does indeed have a prominent place in the heart of the Ione community, over the years serving as a place for

community meetings, bingo, receptions, roller skating, dances, proms, reunions and weddings as well as a meeting hall for the Legion and Legion Auxiliary.

The Legion membership, however, is dwindling, and its membership aging. "We do have a few younger members," said McElligott, "but they're mostly in their 40s. This causes a problem with activities, even self-help work." Many of the members also live out of the Ione area.

The Auxiliary has also done its part over the years in helping support the hall, from cleaning the building to putting on fund raising dinners during WWII to current day quilt raffles.

One such quilt will be raffled off this Sunday, September 12, during a dessert beginning at 4 p.m., sponsored by the Auxiliary. According to Jepsen and McElligott, the appreciation dessert is being put on for the community and for anyone who contributed to the remodeling of hall as well as for anyone who is interested in its conservation.

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