

# Island Mission Trip Gives Hondurans Helping Hand

By Ryan Schlehuber

During her visit to villages in the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa, Ariel Leeper had some difficulty breaking the language barrier with the local children, knowing only a little Spanish. So she laughed and smiled a lot.

Bringing smiles to people in Central America, thousands of miles away from Mackinac Island, was one many things Miss Leeper's mission group from Ste. Anne's Church was able to accomplish during an eight-day stay.

She was one of 43 people who journeyed there from March 24 through April 2. With her were 20 Island residents, 23 other volunteers from northern Michigan and the Detroit and Grand Rapids area, and 90 suitcases of medicine and supplies that would help in treating 1,111 Honduran people who rarely receive health treatment.

The mission encompassed five communities, Nuevo

Paraiso, a village for single mothers and their children, Pedro Atala, a home for children who are orphaned or have mothers in prison, Nuevo Esperanza, a training center for girls, Montana de Luz, a hospice for children with AIDS and HIV, and Flor Azul, a farm for boys learning how to grow crops and run a business.

The group set up assistance brigades around the area during its eight-day stay, which drew long waiting lines at the local schools where the brigades were set up.

"People walked for miles to get to us," said Valerie Porter of Mackinac Island and Cheboygan, who served as an interpreter. She said 80 percent of the country is unemployed.

Brother Jim Boynton, who grew up in St. Ignace and spends summers at Ste. Anne's Church on Mackinac Island, organized the group to provide assistance to the child aid group, Sociedad Amigo de los Ninos, based in the Honduran capital city of



Dr. Joe Caudry and his daughter, Carol, assist a Honduran girl with dental work. Work mostly was done at a school, where equipment and supplies could be set up inside. Patients waited their turn. Many of them were treated outside, under the shade of trees or on the porches. (Photography courtesy of Rick Linn)



Volunteer nurse Sindy Karpathian (left) and volunteer Val Porter show Honduran children how to dance. (Photograph courtesy of Rick Linn)

Tegucigalpa.

Sociedad Amigo de los Ninos was founded by Sister Maria Rosa Leggol 40 years ago, and she established a chapel, day care center, a primary and secondary school, a health clinic, a vocational training center, the Montana de Luz hospice, and the Flor Azul farm.

The Ste. Anne's group included two doctors, a dentist, an oral surgeon, seven nurses, an emergency medical technician, a paramedic, seven interpreters, one veterinarian, one pharmacist, two electricians, carpenters, eight students, plus Ste. Anne's pastor, Father Rey Garcia, and Br. Boynton.

"Each day we had different people go out on different projects," said Br. Boynton.

The students served as assistants and floated from one brigade to the other until they found one they liked, said Miss Leeper, who worked mostly with Dr. Steve Burns, a veterinarian from Cheboygan, treating many of the village pets and livestock.

"I liked the veterinarian station because I got to help with the animals," she said. "We helped this newborn lamb who was sick and dehydrated. We gave it fluids and gave its mother antibiotics. I prayed for it all week and, by the time we left, it was healthy and walking around."

Miss Leeper's father, Tim, owner of the Big Store, was one of many who donated to the mission journey. He donated stuffed animals, which were handed out to the Honduran children after their medical or dental visit.

Mrs. Porter said Dr. Burns carried his supplies up the road and stopped at homes along the way to ask if he could treat people's pets.

"The people were so amazed and so delighted that a veterinarian from America would just show up and offer to treat their pets," she said.

Kyle Sweet, a Mackinac Island junior, helped workers expand a road through the village, digging eight-foot holes and placing in eight new light posts.

"I've learned through this experience how much we can help others, that we can have a positive affect on a community if we try," said Mr. Sweet.

Island paramedic Rick Linn said he was impressed to see how happy the locals were, even with the many difficulties they face.

"They don't have a lot, but they are happy with what they do have," he said. "For all we have, I think we forget sometimes what we need, as oppose to what we want."

Mrs. Porter, who made the trip with her daughter, Lily, said



Ariel Leeper holds a baby lamb, which she helped nurse back to health with veterinarian Dr. Steve Burns of Cheboygan. The group split up in four brigades: veterinarian, medical, dental, and construction. (Photograph courtesy of Ariel Leeper)

the experience to interact, help, and connect with people of a different culture was enlightening.

One of the most impressive experiences on the trip for her was meeting the 80-year-old Sister Maria on the last day the group was there.

"You knew when you met her that she was someone of importance, a Honduran celebrity," she said. "She has done so much for that area. She was an orphan, herself, so she made the homes at the orphanage like real homes."

Mrs. Porter explained that each home at the orphanage was occupied by 10 children and one "aunt," or "tia."

"I met one tia, she was 18 years old, her father had died and she was working there to raise money for her mother and siblings," Mrs. Porter said.

Interacting with the children was perhaps the group's favorite experience.

"Everyone hugs and kisses you on the cheek," said Ariel.

"The kids were my favorite thing about the trip," said Mr. Sweet. "They were really nice. They would climb all over you."

One group of school children showed their appreciation to the group, singing to them as the group approached their school.

As the group was leaving to go back to the United States, one of the volunteers noticed a Honduran child wearing a Mackinac Island T-shirt.

"It just goes to show you how small of a world we live in," said Mr. Linn. "This trip was such a different experience than just your average tourist trip."

"It was an incredible trip," said Br. Boynton, "and all involved learned much about Honduran people and culture, and about themselves in what they could accomplish."



Forty-three people participated in Ste. Anne's Church mission to Honduras March 24 to April 2. The group included (front, sitting, from left) Gayle Lamoreaux, Father Rey Garcia; (second row, kneeling) Tymon Horn, Kyle Sweet, Ariel Leeper, Darcy Brodeur-Bunker, Maureen Bacon, Kate Dupre, Lily Porter, Larry Howley; (third row) Dr. Joe Caudy, Alexandria Murphy, Kathy Ledtke, Patty Caudy, Autumn Ledtke, JoAnn Gorby (almost hidden), Carol Caudy, Aimee Jazdzy, Gail Becker, Pat Leveille, Renee Reimann, Patty Boynton, Brian Murphy, Val Porter, Anthony Fior, Joyce Gustafson; (fourth row) Brother Jim Boynton, Dr. Steve Burns, Dr. Jen Tryban, Jim Shannon, MaryAnne Shannon, Dr. Richard Plezia, Dora Quintanilla, Sarah Howley, Rick Linn, Sindy Karpathian, Mac Armstrong, Jessica Stempky, Jane Bacon, Dr. Michael Bacon, Darren Chase, Dennis Hannon, and Dan Chase. (Photograph provided by Rick Linn)