

Tres Islas Orphanage Fund's spring mission weeks

Labors of love and lots of laughter

By Ruth Clarke

The Tres Islas Orphanage Fund's annual spring mission week – when Tres Islas donors make improvements to five Mazatlán orphanages – takes place April 10th through 16th this year. During mission weeks, donors seem to fly “like busy bees with joyful hearts” from orphanage to orphanage making improvements, lunching with the children, sharing games and crafts, cooking and laughing a lot, according to Donelle Manton who founded the organization in 1987.

“Between 25 and 40 donors from across Canada and the United States participate in each spring mission week,” Manton explains. She credits her husband Tom for devoting as much time as she to the fund's endeavors. Their efforts have garnered results. Orphanage directors say without Tres Islas, they wouldn't be able to provide for the children as they do. One hundred percent of every donation helps the children—none is taken for administration, salaries or compensation.

This year in addition to other generous donations, Canadian benefactors purchased seven new washing machines for four of the orphanages, Manton gratefully acknowledged, who also praised Tres Islas facilitators Lena Brown and Gaudelia Cruz Hernandez for their consistent help.

“Lena's daily presence and assistance are invaluable,” she says. “Tres Islas accomplishes much of what it does thanks to Lena's good ideas, vast knowledge and devotion to the youngsters.”

From helping Hernandez coordinate weekly grocery purchases to taking donors on tours, Brown obtains estimates for orphanage improvements, then purchases materials and appliances on behalf of Tres Islas – which the Mantons gratefully acknowledge as an immense undertaking.

It was Hernandez who introduced Manton to Orfanatorio Mazatlán in 1987 when she discovered the plight of youngsters in the orphanages and the opportunity to serve them. Today Hernandez purchases all food, school supplies, shoes, uniforms and backpacks for the children.



Reconstructing basketball backboards at Ciudad de los Niños

Organizing each spring mission week actually begins the year before.

“Each December, we make initial ‘scouting’ visits to the orphanages, meeting with directors to learn needs and which areas require improvements,” Manton explains.

“For example, we created receiving rooms in the orphanages, complete with shelving and storage bins. Donors keep the bins stocked throughout the year with daily needs.”

“From January through March, we coordinate with directors finalizing upcoming improvements,” she says. “We inform donors of the needs – because Tres Islas donors fund the spring mission weeks,” she explains, adding, “Loyal donors fund improvements even if they're unable to attend.”

Throughout the week, donors paint, landscape, replace worn-out mattresses, restore volleyball and basketball courts, stock receiving rooms with supplies, and update facilities—all done with a sense of accomplishment and connection with the children – which results in their returning to help year-after-year.

There's also time for fellowship and fun. The first Sunday, donors host an annual beach barbecue and afternoon on the beach for the children. Donors purchase the food, La Costa Marinera Restaurante prepares it as their gift to the children and donors serve the children.

“The barbecue begins with a giant prayer circle where everyone holds each others' hands, as the fund's chaplain offers a prayer of thanks – first in Spanish so the children may understand – then in English.”

“Waiters tell us that patrons pause to witness the prayer circle and many get teary-eyed when they learn what is happening... it's a glorious sight to behold.”

At the end of each spring mission week, Tres Islas hosts a fiesta at Orfanatorio Mazatlán for children, donors and directors. On April 15th the annual Tres Islas Orphanage Fund Volunteer of the Year award will again be presented, recognizing an outstanding individual who over the years, has substantially contributed to help improve life for children in Mazatlán's orphanages.

To help make a difference and participate in the children's lives, visit Tres Islas Orphanage Fund's website: www.orphanagefunds.org, write email@orphanagefunds.org or phone 1-888-459-8463 (U.S.) or 1-541-459-7535 (Int'l).



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