

Helping the Planet's Poor

By Mark Browne

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Sending relief shipments off to third world countries is keeping Dell Marie Wergeland rather busy these days.

Wergeland volunteers as the coordinator of the Compassionate Resource Warehouse, located on Devonshire Road. For the last couple of years, Wergeland, and about 30 volunteers, have been collecting everything from school supplies to medical supplies and shipping it all off to the less advantaged of the third World.

Wergeland took the News on a tour of the warehouse, crammed full of items waiting to be shipped off to various destinations around the globe. Stacks of school desks, hospital beds and numerous piles of boxes - some of which are labeled with destinations such as El Salvador - are just a few of the items that practically fill up the entire building.

The office in the warehouse is covered with pictures of people in far away places, including a young disabled Haitian girl. The images show the recipients of the assistance made possible by the local humanitarian organization.

"Those are just some of the pictures. It really gets you going - you see the need," says Wergeland. While visiting such Central American countries as Honduras, Wergeland says she came across some horrid situations. Those experiences made Wergeland realize the need to establish a permanent organization to help the impoverished in the Third World.

She notes she visited one hospital where the same syringes had to be used several times. "They just had watered down alcohol to dip them in for sterilization," Wergeland recalls. She notes she was working in one refugee camp where she and the other workers were inundated with people asking for medicine for their children. Wergeland explains the idea for the Compassionate Resource Warehouse came out of a trip she and a group of people, who

weren't affiliated with any particular organization, made to Honduras. At the time, the Central American nation had just been hit by Hurricane Mitch. While providing assistance to the hurricane victims, Wergeland and her companions quickly realized how bad off many people in that country were. They decided to send more supplies to Honduras once they got back home to Canada. "After sending supplies to Honduras we realized there was a real need for this kind of thing and that there's lots of countries with crisis' that need stuff," she says, "It just sort of continued to grow since then."

The Compassionate Resource Warehouse is essentially a project made possible by the Nazarene Compassionate Ministries. While the latter is an agency of its own, it is affiliated with the Church of Nazarene. Wergeland notes the church-which has a presence in 135 nations - provides help to get relief to people in need in those countries. At the same time, the Compassionate Resource Warehouse partners with other agencies such as Universal Aid, in order to get relief shipments to where they are needed.

"The relief agency business has its own network," she says. Because the Church of Nazarene is a non-profit organization, its churches in various countries can accept relief shipments without the Compassionate Resource Warehouse having to pay any duties," says Wergeland.

Since the creation of the Compassionate Resource Warehouse, Wergeland has only gone along when the agency has sent small shipments. She says her big dream is to follow a forty-foot container to its final destination. Wergeland says the local relief organization is attempting to establish itself as a resource for other groups such as those concerned with providing medical aid to Third World countries.

The Compassionate Resource Warehouse attracts a variety of volunteers, from young people to Greater Victoria-area Rotary clubs. Wergeland, a Saanich resident who is married with two grown children and a granddaughter, originally took on the task of coordinating the local agency as a part-time gig. "I'm becoming more full time," Wergeland says with a chuckle.

The Compassionate Resource Warehouse sends much of its relief shipments out in forty-foot long containers. So far this year, the agency has sent two shipments to El Salvador, and one shipment to Bolivia, as well as five or six smaller shipments to other countries.

"It took us about a year to gather the first stuff for the first container. A forty-footer takes a lot of stuff. It took us that long to gather enough for one," says Wergeland.

Companies from throughout the Capital Region have been more than generous in helping the relief agency make a go of it. The warehouse was donated by EY Construction Ltd. while Bekins Moving and Storage and Sidney Freight are just two of the moving companies that have moved items to the warehouse free of charge, says Wergeland. Local hospitals and doctor's offices have donated lots of supplies such as hospital beds. "It just seems to come in," says Wergeland with a smile.

Aside from medical and school supplies, the agency has sent other items including clothing (that is still in good shape), sewing supplies and even a few toys to the third world, says Wergeland.

The Compassionate Resource Warehouse is always looking for people with various skills. The agency is also, of course, always on the hunt for more school supplies, computers (386 and above), sewing supplies and hardware tools.

Anyone who wants to help can call Wergeland at (250)479-9342.