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International aid group kept busy

There's more than industry in the heart of Esquimalt's industrial area – there's a little heart as well

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The Compassionate Resource Warehouse is bustling with activity these days. The volunteer organization collects and ships everything from school supplies to hospital beds to the developing world. In the past few weeks, CRW coordinator Dell Marie Wergeland says the organization's warehouse, on Devonshire Road has been very busy. "We've done our tenth load already this year for 2004," she says.

Last week, the volunteers with the organization were busy loading up a container with school desks, blackboards and other items for a large school in northern China.

The Red Cross will ensure the school receives items collected from around the Capital Region, items much needed in the wake of severe floods that hit the area last fall, Wergeland says. "We've got a whole pile of toques, sweaters, scarves and school supplies," says Wergeland. "There are probably about 400 knitted scarves and hoods that are on this load." As it currently stands, the kids are attending school in tents, she says.

The organization recently sent a load of schoolbooks off to the Philippines. Another load of supplies, including school desks, was also sent to the Philippines to a town outside the country's capital of Manila. A local group in the town established a school for 200 children but lacked furniture and other school supplies.

"They set up a little school- so we furnished it," says Wergeland. A load of medical and school supplies left Victoria in January bound for a school and a clinic in Bolivia. In the same month, the CRW sent a load of medical supplies to Uganda. "And we sent a load of clothes to Belarus," adds Wergeland.

The organization recently shipped off medical supplies to Kenya to help orphans infected with the HIV virus. The shipment included 35 bicycles to give medical aid workers some form of transportation to make their rounds and provide assistance to the children. The next shipment the organization is putting together consists of medical supplies destined for the Maldives, says Wergeland, with a shipment of supplies for Nigeria to follow.

"We're covering an awful lot of territory," says Wergeland. While visiting such Central American countries as Honduras a number of years ago, Wergeland came across some horrid situations. Those experiences made Wergeland realize the need to establish a permanent local organization to help those in the impoverished developing world.

The local group bases its operations out of a Devonshire Road warehouse, 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 148 countries - provides relief shipments to those who need it in those countries.

At the same time, CRW partners with other relief agencies such as Universal Aid in order to get relief shipments to where they are needed. The organization has attracted help from everyone from young people to Greater Victoria-area Rotary clubs.

Most of the relief shipments leave Victoria in forty-foot long shipping containers. Wergeland says organizations and residents in the Capital Region continue to be generous with donations.

"It's fabulous. People are hearing more and more about us," she says. "People have been very, very generous." Still, Wergeland says the organization could always use more donations of various items. For instance, there is always a strong need for school supplies, including paper, pens, rulers and pencils.

"And medical supplies are always in demand," says Wergeland. Tools, nuts and bolts are also needed, she adds. The organization sent nails to help build the school in the Philippines.

Wergeland says the organization is always looking for more volunteers to help with preparing the shipments.