



South Hills residents deliver aid to Costa Rica

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It's about giving back.

A group of men from the South Hills are taking that message to heart as they help out the less fortunate abroad.

Months ago, after seeing an article in the Tico Times, an English language newspaper in Central America, detailing the efforts of a local mission feeding children in the Costa Rican town of Tibas, Mitch Zychowski wanted to do something to help.

A businessman familiar with fundraisers, who helped get the Enjoy coupon book off the ground six years ago, Zychowski was on a plane flying out of Costa Rica when he read the story.

“When I saw the article, I had to get involved. We do it for the kids. It just breaks your heart to see them,” said Zychowski, a resident of South Park who grew up in Brentwood.

To provide the aid he hoped to bring, Zychowski brought some of his friends onboard, including Jefferson Hills resident Jack Benson who was instrumental in contributing supplies to the venture.

The community kitchen working in Costa Rica was founded by a Catholic priest and a handful of residents nearly one year ago to provide area children with a complete meal each day.

Approximately 20 mothers from the town rotate working in the kitchen, preparing the daily meal one week per month. Most of the children are 12 or younger and very poor.

Zychowski described most homes as having mud floors and tin roofs. The food provided by charity is some of the only solid food available to those children.

Before Zychowski, Benson and others got involved, financing primarily came from the Catholic Church, which provides regular shipments of rice, beans and oil. Other donations provided approximately \$300-\$400 for food supplies.

“They do get some funding, but now they can afford to feed all the children that are there,” says Zychowski.

After getting in touch with the organization in Costa Rica, Zychowski's next move was to begin traveling to the town and allocating funds so they could continue feeding the children of that town.

Zychowski and the others who wanted to help have made numerous trips to Costa Rica since.

“When we came down, they couldn't believe it. The children were so excited. They thought we were a gift from God.”

The “Pittsburgh Way” as they have come to call themselves, contribute roughly \$1000 a month to the mission of feeding the kids. Money comes both from organized fundraisers or from group members own pockets.

But taking the time and providing the resources necessary has been well worth it for Zychowski, Benson and the others.

“What we give to them, they give us 10 times more,” say Benson.

Now taking trips on a nearly monthly basis to that town, they bring food but also supplies including t-shirts, lollipops and shoes to the adoring children.

“We're committed to raising money for these kids and we're going to do it,” says Zychowski. “It's so wonderful to give back. This has changed my life, words just can't explain it.”

To find out more, or to help in the aid effort, call 412-481-9460.

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