

Life

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The Rainbow Network reflects and looks to the future as it celebrates a milestone in its Nicaraguan ministry.

500 MIRACLES



RAINBOW NETWORK

The Garcia-Rodriguez family lives in the 500th house built by Rainbow Network in the community of Las Pilas in El Crucero, Nicaragua. The Springfield-based outreach reached the milestone this year. The ministry provides not only homes, but food, clean water and medical care.

500 MIRACLES

Rainbow Network has passed a milestone, building its 500th house, but the next 500 houses will go up in less than half that time, founder Keith Jaspers says.

The Springfield-based outreach to Nicaragua began in October 1995 when Jaspers decided to turn his business acumen into a ministry. Since that time, Rainbow Network has served tens of thousands of the poorest people in Central America, providing homes, food and clean water, medical care, education and small-business loans.

But it is the houses — with 350 square feet of living space, clay tile floors, concrete block walls and a sheet metal roof — that provide the basis for miracles, Jaspers says.

“When you move a family from that,” he says, pointing to a photo of a family standing in front of a stick and dirt shack, “to that,” pointing to a photo of a newly built home the family is now living in, “a miracle happens. Everybody’s life is changed.”

The reality of 500 miracles has translated into:

- about 4,000 people living in a clean, safe home
- more than 8,400 children in 544



Audio slideshow: The Rev. Mark Struckhoff of the Rainbow Network talks about the process of building new homes for the people of Nicaragua. View the slideshow by clicking the link at News-Leader.com/life



RAINBOW NETWORK

Like Benjamin, thousands of Nicaraguan children grow up in desperate conditions.

By Linda Leicht • lleicht@news-leader.com

Celebrate

Rainbow Network will celebrate the completion of 500 homes in Nicaragua with an open house at the Rainbow Network office at 5 p.m. Monday.

On hand will be Keith Jaspers, president and founder of Rainbow Network, and the U.S. staff and board.

Visitors also will be able to meet with two senior staff leaders from Nicaragua, Nelson Palacios, national director, and Mario Banderes, assistant director.

The Rainbow Network office is located at 3834 South Ave. For more information, call 889-8088.

Rainbow schools, almost 1,200 students attending high school, with nearly 300 graduating this year

• at least 12,900 children, pregnant and nursing women and elderly people eating at 155 Rainbow feeding centers

- more than 4,100 people getting medical care
- nearly 3,200 people getting business loans
- and more than 48,000 men, women and children in 128 communities

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\$9 million needed to reach new Rainbow Network goal

Rainbow Network has a new goal. The Christian ministry aims to serve 56,000 people in rural Nicaragua, a 17 percent increase by 2008.

To make that happen, Rainbow will have to raise \$9 million over the next three years. Of that, an estimated \$8 million will provide health care programs, feeding centers, public health programs, educational opportunities, small business loans and permanent housing for families.

Another part of the ambitious campaign is to build a Rainbow Network Partnership Center in Managua, the capital city of Nicaragua, that will include the national headquarters and offices, a warehouse and a medical center.

There, humanitarian supplies can be stored, a central medical laboratory and clinic will serve the outlying areas, volunteers can be trained and conference space can bring in leadership from around the country.

The cost is estimated at

\$450,000-\$550,000.

A U.S.-based headquarter would also help to grow support and donors here, separate the facility from Jaspers Family Hotels off The cost is estimated at \$250,000.

A fourth goal is to create an endowment fund of \$300,000 to help ensure there is no lapse in service in Nicaragua. Gifts and pledges to Campaign to Serve 56,000 can be made in a variety of ways from general donations to pledges designated to specific areas of the ministry: health care, education, economic development or housing.

Churches are making pledges as “Village Sponsors” providing funding for a specific community in Nicaragua.

One-time gifts are also welcome.

To learn more, call 889-8088. Gifts and pledges can also be sent to Rainbow Partnership Center, 3834 South Ave., Springfield, MO 65807.

— Linda Leicht

Homes: 18 denominations

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ties whose lives have been changed by all those daily miracles.

"I can't overestimate the importance" of those houses, Jaspers says.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Jaspers' next goal is to build another 500 houses by 2010. Seventy of them are either already built or under construction.

After that, he is confident the ministry will be able to build 500 a year.

"We can do that," he says with the same conviction that originally propelled him into the ministry.

A MINISTRY WELL-MANAGED

When Rainbow Network began nearly 12 years ago, Jaspers had a plan. He wanted to set up a program to help poor people help themselves, and he wanted to do it where it would not otherwise get done.

He found Nicaragua, where political, economic and natural disasters have left the majority of the population living at a level of poverty that is rivaled only by Haiti in the Western Hemisphere.

Using methods he learned working with Habitat for Humanity, Jaspers began his ministry with his own money, one employee and a minimal knowledge of Spanish. Today, he easily converses with the 71 Nicaraguan staff members, including 14 doctors and two dentists.

Support from around the United States, and especially the Ozarks, has raised the ministry's budget to \$2 million, with 98 percent of donations going directly into services.

In Springfield, there are three paid employees and 15 to 20 volunteers in the Rainbow office every day. In Nicaragua, there are nearly 3,000 volunteers working in their own and neighboring communities to make the Rainbow Network miracles happen.



aid mission work

Families do not move into the new Rainbow Network homes until all homes in the project are complete. Rainbow Network, having reached the 500-houses milestone, is looking to the next 500.

"That's what makes the money multiply," says Jaspers. "They do the work."

It was that careful use of finances and the involvement of the people in Nicaragua that convinced Bill and Dorothy Latham to support the ministry.

Latham is a Virginia hotelier who learned about Rainbow



Latham

Network two years ago when Jaspers invited him to visit Nicaragua.

They finally went there in early April.

"My wife and I agreed then and there that we would do it," says Latham. "We've traveled the world over and have seen a lot of mission work ... We have never seen any as well managed as this."

The Lathams attended a dedication ceremony for 20 new homes — including the 500th one — built in the Las Pilas community in El Crucero in southwest Nicaragua.

There, he noticed two horses and a mule saddled up and tied to a tree. The mounts seemed out of place in an area where most people traveled by foot or bus, so he asked about them.

He learned that two people had ridden down the mountain to take the doctor back with them after lunch.

Why on horseback? he asked. The answer surprised him — you can't get up there any other way.

"It's something I will never forget," says Latham. "And they're feeding children up in that village."

Palacios

PLANS FOR 500 MORE

Nelson Palacios is Rainbow's director in Nicaragua. Originally from Nagarote, where Rainbow Network has four housing projects, Palacios was a high school teacher for 20 years.

When he saw the work Rainbow was doing in his own community, especially

with education, he decided he wanted to be part of the ministry. He has worked with Rainbow since 2000.

Even Palacios is impressed with the work done and the momentum of the ministry.

"I never thought we would ever reach 500 houses," he says through an interpreter. "It is a great joy for everybody, especially the families benefiting from having a house."

"It's like a surprise blessing for God for all of us."

Now, Palacios is already planning for the next 500 houses. Another 20 houses were dedicated in Los Fierros in El Crucero on Wednesday, and 35 more will be built in Amatitan in LaPaz Centro by the end of December.

And Rainbow has land in 10

more areas, ready to build more than 300 homes. "We just need the money," he says.

In Nicaragua, a lot of families live in very bad conditions, Palacios explains.

"We have it in our hands to give a blessing to those people."

Jaspers is confident that the money will come as more people learn about the work being done.

Last year, about 6,000 financial gifts were made to Rainbow, he says. More than 300 churches, representing about 18 denominations, support the ministry.

"That's part of the magic," he says. "Everyone finds common ground when they work with the Rainbow."