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## THE EXPOSITOR

Brantford Expositor (ON)

Local News, Monday, December 11, 2006, p. A4

### **Christmas vacation, charity style Brantford family joins ranks of humanitarian tourists**

**Jennifer Clarke**

*A local family is among hundreds of Canadians who are packing extra suitcases when they travel to impoverished nations in a growing trend of humanitarian vacationing.*

*"More and more Canadians are picking up one of our donated suitcases, containing essential medical supplies like sutures and antibiotics, to deliver to deprived clinics near their hotel destinations in Africa, the Orient and the Caribbean," says Denise Taylor, co-founder of the Canadian non-profit organization Not Just Tourists.*

Dr. Ken Taylor and his wife, Denise, created the charity in St. Catharines a decade ago after witnessing extreme poverty and shortages in the medical field firsthand. Not Just Tourists receives pharmaceuticals nearing the end of their shelf life and provides willing tourists with a suitcase of medical supplies, customs paperwork and the local contacts necessary to deliver the aid.

"It's a wonderful experience for Canadians to not only witness real, serious poverty, but to do something to help. It's an amazing eye-opener ... in many cases people come back to share how it's changed their lives."

Brantford's McGuire family changed their celebration of Christmas after being Not Just Tourists in the Dominican Republic.

Inspired by a co-worker who skips Christmas, opting instead for the gift

of tickets to the tropics, Gail McGuire decided to give "our children the option to choose which Christmas they would prefer: to stay at home in Brantford and have a typical Christmas, or to forego their own gifts and let a trip south be their gift."

Although her husband, Trevor, first thought Gail crazy to suggest a Caribbean Christmas, no one missed anything about exchanging a bounty of wrapped gifts around a sparkling fir tree and sharing all the trimmings of a turkey dinner.

Again this year, the McGuire family will "celebrate our Christmas by delivering gift bags to needy children in the back villages of the Dominican Republic, as well as delivering medical supplies to the local clinic," Gail explains.

And sons Trevor, 17, and Isaac, 10, will hand out goody bags of items they hope to have donated from Brantford businesses. "At home, we celebrated, but in the Dominican we helped others to celebrate Christmas," says Isaac.

"Last Christmas, the Brantford Mall Dental Office provided toothbrushes and toothpaste to take to the children, and a friend received donations of pens, pencils and erasers from Staples Business in London. But it breaks my heart," Gail says, referring to memories of Dominican children running and skipping with the joy of receiving a toothbrush and pen. "They

get so much out of items we consider so insignificant".

Gail explains how her family celebrates Christmas as Not Just Tourists:

"We drive down the worst roads I've ever encountered. The village is west of La Romana on the southern shores, and is just a cluster of tin shacks. Most of the shacks have dirt floors, and no running water or hydro.

"The garbage was just overwhelming: with no city pickup and such torrential rainfalls, trash blankets the land. Wild dogs, boars and horses roam freely, sifting through the waste looking for food.

"We could not tell any locals that we were coming for fear of being overtaken by a mass of people. As we arrive, children come running to see who is in the expensive vehicle. The minister took us into one shack and had the children meet the 'people all the way from Canada.'"

The children came forward and were handed gift bags by sons Isaac and Trevor, she says.

"The children were so happy. I took their pictures, showing them their portraits on the digital camera, and they all laughed to see themselves captured in an instant. We left extra gift bags with the pastor for him to give to late comers, but I'm not certain that there were enough. This year, I am determined to put a small

toy and a piece of candy in each gift bag."

She smiles, though, at the thought of the San Pedro de Macoris clinician's exhausted eyes welling with tears as the suitcase opens to show IV bags, antibiotics, and the additional children's Tylenol and Advil donated by Brantford's Grand Woodland's Medical Clinic.

This year, when Christmas plans came up for discussion, the McGuires didn't hesitate. "We all wanted to go south again to deliver gift bags, and more NJT suitcases.

"As long as we are physically and financially able, we will make every attempt to continue this Christmas tradition."

To donate items for the McGuires to bring south, contact Gail at 519-750-0370 or mcguireclan@rogers.com. To donate or participate with Not Just Tourists, contact Denise Taylor at 905-646-5110 or notjusttourists@yahoo.ca.

**Figure:**

The McGuire family - Trevor Jr., Trevor Sr., Gail and Isaac - stand outside a church in the Dominican Republic last year. They'll be bringing medical supplies and gifts to the Caribbean again this Christmas as part of a humanitarian program called Not Just Tourists. Submitted photo

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