

Students, Rotarians join hands to help Mexican village

Cynthia Beaudette

of the Muscatine Journal

MUSCATINE, Iowa – Muscatine High School juniors Samm Carlson and Katie Kenyon say they are looking forward to doing some community service work next month – in Mexico.

Carlson, Kenyon and their fellow junior, Luke Goddard, plan to travel to the village of Xicotepec de Juarez (pronounced hee-KO-ta-pek da Wah-rez), Mexico, where they will be helping with building and land-clearing projects March 5-13.

The project is an example of the type of volunteer work these students hoped to do when they joined the MHS Interact Club, which was established last spring.

The club, a Rotary International-based organization for youths, acts as a service corps whose members serve as volunteers in their own community and abroad.

MHS teacher Andrea Stewart, advisor to the club, said Muscatine Rotary member Mark Mather has been working with the students to plan the trip.

Mather said the trip will include other Iowa Rotarians

Background

According to a University of Iowa press release, the Xicotepec project was first established through the efforts of Rotarians from Iowa City in 2001. District 6000 joined the project in 2004. The Rotarians are seeking to improve water quality in this city of about 70,000, provide equipment to the fire station, supply equipment for an orphanage and rehabilitation clinic, and help build a primary and secondary school.

from District 6000. The District, located throughout southern Iowa, encompasses about half the state, Mather said. The Iowa

Rotarians will work with the 17 members of Xicotepec Rotarians after arriving in Mexico.

"We've established some wonderful friendships there," said Mather.

The MHS students will be working at the Red Cross station in Xicotepec.

"We'll be helping with maintenance construction work and clearing land around the Red Cross building," said Kenyon.

Kenyon said she went to Mexico as a sixth-grader and enjoyed learning first-hand about another culture. She said she was impressed with the idea of going to Mexico to volunteer.

"We're helping build a community instead of just sending money," she said.

Carlson said she hopes this visit will inspire others to take part in the project. "When we come back, we can share what happened and maybe in the future, more people will want to go," she said.

Mather first visited Xicotepec in the spring of 2004 with his wife, Becky, and their daughter, Caitlin, who is an MHS senior and member of Interact.

He and his family intend to return to Xicotepec March 12-20 with a second group, during the second week of the planned visit

to the area.

The Mathers will be part of a group of 50 people that includes Rotarians from District 6000 and students from the University of Iowa and Iowa State University.

Kenyon, Goddard and Carlson will be joined by Muscatine Rotarians Jim King, John Schwandke and Karen Diercks. King's wife, Grace, will also be on the trip. Mather said this first group will join 18 other students and Rotarians from Iowa.

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