

# Inside

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Stratford/Perth

## A happy accident for Central students

By Brett Holmes

Last month, a group of 25 Central Secondary School students, Stratford Optimist Club members, and Central teachers travelled to Costa Rica – and if the trip didn't go precisely as planned, it was no less inspiring and exciting for that.

Central teachers Dale Bast and Al Booker put together the eco-tourism trip, and Costa Rica was an obvious choice. Costa Rica's tourism industry leads Central America, and is driven mainly by guided tours of the country's pristine national parks and wilderness areas.

They arranged matters with a Costa Rican tour guide, and were satisfied that nine



Central Secondary School students

days of mountain climbing, rain-forest hiking, white-water rafting, and zip-lining would be experience enough for one trip. But, Bast says, "Visiting the school was accidental; it was a mistake, actually."

Not long before they were to depart, the teachers received an itinerary from their guide, and were surprised to find it mentioned the group would be visiting an elementary school. Unfazed by this last-

minute addition, Bast and Booker immediately set about organizing supplies they could give the schoolchildren: school supplies, clothes, and soccer uniforms supplied by Stratford Minor Soccer.

They debarked from their plane in San Jose, only to be met with the news that they had been sent the wrong itinerary. The group from Stratford decided to find another school, and within one day the tour guide managed to schedule a visit to a school in Puerto Viejo de Limon, a poor destination in the remote south-east of the country on the Caribbean Sea.

Although Costa Rica boasts  
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# A beginning to be proud of

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 one of the most stable and prosperous economies in the region, the school was very much in need – not to mention surprised by the enthusiastic group of Canadians bearing a mass of gifts. "We rolled in that morning," Bast says, "with boxes of stuff, coming out of the blue to surprise them." In one day, the children of the school prepared a show for their visitors, complete with song, dance, and traditional costumes.

The school has an enrolment of almost 300 students. It has five classrooms. Two more are under construction; work began three years ago, but was never finished.

The experience was an eye-opening and uplifting one for all concerned. "The Costa Ricans are very hospitable people," Booker

says, "and proud of their country. All of the students were affected by the trip and affected by our visit to the school."

Plans for another excursion in May, 2009, are already underway, this time with a smaller group, and taking a different route around the country.

"We are hoping that it will grow from just a school project," says Bast, "and generate city-wide interest. When we heard that Steve and Carolyn Rae from CJCS were going to cruise the Caribbean and stop at the coastal region, Limon, approximately 30 miles away from the school, we thought it would be a great opportunity for them to visit the school." The Stratford Rotary Club raised \$500 towards the provision of clean water in Puerto Viejo. The experience has given the Stratford travellers something to be deeply proud of, and represents a beginning the teachers hope to expand and continue.



Rhianna More



Dan Hawkins (left), Tom Beatie (centre), and Carlos Mora (right).



Thomas Lappano (front-left), Isabelle Russell (mid-left), Katlin John (back-left), Al Booker (mid-right)



From left to right: Caitlin Thrasher, Rhianna More, Naomi Horst, Dale Bast.



Costa Rican kids put on a show for Stratford visitors.