

IN ANOTHER'S SHOES | HOLLYWOOD TEENAGER ORGANIZES COLLECTION THAT BENEFITS THE NEEDY IN EL SALVADOR

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Fulfilling the vision of a Hollywood teenager, 800 pairs of "gently used" shoes are winging their way to less fortunate people in the Central American country of El Salvador.

Howard Myones, a 15-year-old 11th grader at Hollywood Hills High School in Hollywood spearheaded a project of gathering shoes from all around the community to share with other people.

"I know of kids who wear a pair of shoes for a month and then get a new style," Myones said. "My friends have all kinds of pairs just laying around."

Myones said that he developed the idea after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks when he saw pictures of needy children in Afghanistan on TV. "I saw children who were shoeless and I came up with the idea."

After searching for an organization that could use donated shoes, Myones ran across the Coral Gables-based Salvadoran American Health Association (SAHA).

"We are very excited about the project," said Mariella Sardi, assistant director of SAHA. "We like to see young people get involved because it helps them to see poverty in the world."

Sardi said that her organization is sending the shoes along with Christmas toys to schools in El Salvador. "We have an Adopt a School program in which we try to match schools, individuals, businesses and organizations here with schools in El Salvador. By working through our groups there, we can be sure that things actually get to the people."

SAHA, which will celebrate its 20th anniversary next year, works in the area of nutrition, health, education and social services. Many of the organization's programs are implemented in El Salvador by a sister organization, the Salvadoran Foundation for Health and Human Development (FUSAL). FUSAL provides goods and services to nearly 400 hospitals, clinics, rural health posts, and other charitable institutions throughout El Salvador.

Myones said that he and some of his friends gathered shoes from nine area schools. "Most of them are kids shoes, but we also got some with high heels and other designs," Moynes said.

Moynes friend, Sammy Matalon, a 16-year old eleventh grade student at Hollywood Hills High School, said he is excited about the project. "I want to be involved to help out," he said. "Howard went out of his way to find countries where the shoes could really be used. He found a place where there is a real need."

Matalon said he is happy to help out. "Howard started the program over the summer. I want to help make it a bigger project."

Moynes said that he was very pleased with the response to his first collection of shoes. "We are going to do it again in the Spring in time for Easter," he said.

"Howard presented the idea to me and there was no way that I wanted to stop him," said Joyce Ferguson of Plantation who is principal of the Hollywood Hills High School. "I encouraged him to go for it with banners and flyers and putting bins in the school."

Myones met with representatives of nine elementary schools that feed students to his high school. "All of the elementary principals were in favor of it," Ferguson reported. "By involving the elementary students, Howard will be able to collect more shoes for younger children."

With the help of his brother Andrew, he has developed a web site (www.canuspareapair.org) that uses the slogan "Gently used shoes from American kids who care."

While the shoe project is consuming a lot of time right now, Myones is keeping the solicitation balanced with his other activities and educational goals. "I'm involved in student government and several honor societies," he said.

Myones, who played soccer through the 9th grade, gave up the sport after a hit and run auto accident that broke his femur, shattering any idea of continuing in athletics. "Now I am focusing on this project and school," said Myones who dreams of attending an Ivy League school and becoming an orthopedic surgeon.

"I was inspired to become a doctor by the doctor who treated me after my accident," said Myones, referring to Dr. Stephen Stricker of the University of Miami Jackson Memorial Hospital.

"I'm not surprised that he would want to help out people," Stricker said. "He is a bright, nice boy with a supporting family. His parents have raised him well."

Ferguson is supportive of the project. "I always encourage students to give back to the community," she said. "Besides, to graduate, all of our students have to give 40 hours of service to the community."

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