

Tristate helps Mitch victims

Wednesday, November 25, 1998

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The Cincinnati Enquirer

One woman called offering 100 pairs of gym shoes. Several wanted to know where they could mail checks of \$1,000.

In the three days The Cincinnati Enquirer has published special stories on the plight of Honduras after Hurricane Mitch, almost 200 readers from Northern Kentucky to Oxford have called a local foundation offering help.

Cincinnati-based Shoulder to Shoulder Inc., a non-profit group featured in the series, brought in volunteers to help handle the calls.



"My phone didn't stop ringing from 8:30 in the morning to 8:30 at night," said Jan Patterson, a volunteer from Wyoming who began getting calls Sunday when the first story ran with her name and number. "The outpouring has been overwhelming. They want to know where they can donate, where to send checks," she said.

Offered are medical supplies, clothing, money and time. Some want to take the trip themselves to help in Honduras and deliver the supplies.

Shoulder to Shoulder is asking Greater Cincinnati to commit to helping three areas of Honduras for the next year: La Lima, the base of Tela Railroad Co., a subsidiary of Cincinnati-based Chiquita Brands International, in the northwest; the northern state of Yoro; and Santa Lucia, the southwestern city where Shoulder to Shoulder established a clinic six years ago.

A team of foundation members and volunteers is traveling to Honduras in mid-December to make sure the goods sent last week are getting to the right spot. They also will try to learn what more is needed.

Rebuilding the Central American nation could take years. More than 6,000 people were killed and 1.4 million were left homeless from the storm that wiped out about 70 percent of the country's crops.

Help from Canada, the United States, Japan, the Netherlands and other countries is pouring in, but many residents are still wanting.

Hundreds of villagers remain trapped on banana plantations north of the Yoro city of El Progreso a month after the storm.

Relief workers are waiting for permission from the Honduran Ministry of Education to bring the villagers to El Progreso for shelter in the public schools, Ruth de Castro, administrator of the Christian Medical Society of Honduras, said Tuesday.

But the Education Ministry won't give the green light unless there are homes lined up for the displaced when the school year resumes Feb. 1, Mrs. Castro said.

"They have to provide houses where there is not a risk anymore," she said, referring to the muddy, disease-ridden legacy of Mitch. "That is a problem because we don't have enough land."

The solution is large investments from banks, foreign governments and the private sector, coupled with local projects and low-interest loans from non-profit groups, said Marge Tsitouris, director of the emergency group for CARE USA, based in Atlanta.

The money would lead to projects that could employ Hondurans and rebuild roads and bridges at the same time, Mrs. Tsitouris said.

"Potentially, there could be a lot of work for people if there was sufficient capital investment," Mrs. Tsitouris said. "What did we do during the Depression? We put people to work to build."

The investment could also be used to build safe housing near factories and other types of employment, she said.

Without the money to build such safe and adequate housing, peasants will continue to be pushed higher up the mountainsides to farm for beans and corn. This practice in the past led to trees being cut down, which could have contributed to the hurricane's landslides.

"We have to get it right so we protect the natural resource base and provide everyone a decent standard of living," Mrs. Tsitouris said. "There's a need for a commitment not just for the short term, but the midterm and the long term."

"This thing is bigger than all of us."