

Boat to Nicaragua exceeds expectations

by Mark Roppel

Organizers of the third annual boatload of aid to Nicaragua achieved more than double their goal last month. A nationwide campaign involving 1500 people managed to collect slightly more than one million dollars.

The boat left Vancouver on December 12 and arrived in Managua last week.

Originally the campaign targeted to raise \$500,000.

"We thought we would have a tough time making that," says Harvey MacKinnon of the

Vancouver-based Coalition for Aid to Nicaragua (CAN).

The shipment contained everything from heavy equipment to school books.

"There was hospital equipment - incubators, x-ray machines, and an electro-cardio encephalogram, medicine, hammer and saws, fishing gear, office equipment, school supplies, and even some musical instruments," says McKinnon.

A \$20,000 tractor, an ambulance, and a pickup truck were also sent along.

The Nicaraguan government is happy with the success of CAN.

"Not only the government, but the people of Nicaragua are pleased," says Jaime Tavila of the Nicaraguan Embassy in Ottawa. "We do need the support of the Canadians."

Four Canadian observers - Phil Westman, Debra Lewis, Dr. Micky Rostowker, and Cathy Ellis - are in Nicaragua to oversee the distribution of the supplies.

MacKinnon says there is no chance that the supplies will be

used for military purposes.

"We know the stuff we sent down last year was well used."

Transportation of goods across Canada was done free of charge by Canadian Pacific Transport, Motorways-Trucking, Freightliner, and "some smaller firms that weren't too significant," says McKinnon.

Alberta contributed \$50,000 to \$60,000 to the coalition.

"We're not one of the stronger groups," says local

organizer and political science student Oscar Ammar.

But Ammar says the contribution from the U of A campus was considerable.

"We sent 450 pounds of medicine, eight boxes of clothes, one box of school supplies, and \$1000 dollars," says Ammar. "That's from here, just from campus."

The Students' Union Eugene Brody Board donated \$450 of the \$1000 total.

Ammar says next year should be more successful. "Oxfam, the Edmonton El Salvador Solidarity Committee, some church groups and the Edmonton Learner Center have all met and are working on the boat for the next year."

He says 18-20 people are already involved in planning for next year. He also says the NDP is willing to help.

Ammar says there are two reasons for the campaign: "To help refugees in Nicaragua, and Canadians will benefit from learning more about Central America."

"It's purely a humanitarian gesture," says Ammar. "This is not political."

"People around here are willing to help, they just need to be encouraged," says Ammar.

"It would be good if the president of the Students' Union endorsed it (CAN) next year."

He says that in the minds of Nicaraguans, gestures such as the boatload of aid "separate Canadians from Americans and from the Canadian government."

Harvey MacKinnon says he hopes the success of the Coalition campaign will prompt the Canadian government to send more aid to Nicaragua.

"Over the past three years, the Canadian government has sent \$40,000,000 of aid to Honduras (a country hostile to the Sandanista's regime in Nicaragua)," says MacKinnon. "They have only sent \$4.5 million in food aid and \$240,000 of non food aid (to Nicaragua)."

The December Boat was the third annual shipment of aid to Nicaragua.

The 1982 boat carried \$125,000 of aid. The first boat had \$69,000 worth of supplies on board.

Money for AIDS

CALGARY (CUP) — The gay community here has donated \$10,000 to the University of Calgary for AIDS research.

AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome - is a deadly disease which affects several known high risk groups, including gay men.

"In terms of the donations we receive from individuals, this is significant," said research services director Bob Martin, adding that donations from individuals usually range from \$5 to \$1,000.

Martin said the research will focus on information gathering and sharing, and will be tied into related areas of research the university is doing, such as immunology and hematology.

"We're encouraging those who have the background and interest or experience, to work to deal with this problem," Martin said.

One of the researchers, he added was involved in identifying the first reported case of AIDS in Calgary.

Because there have been only isolated cases of AIDS reported in Western Canada, Martin said the exchange of information is vital to gaining more knowledge about the unusual fatal disease.

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