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### **Third mission to Mexico leaves today**

Mexico: Patrol cars and 50-foot firetruck among vehicles, supplies donated to communities in need

#### **STACEY MULICK; The News Tribune**

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For the third time in two years, a group of South Sound volunteers is leaving for Mexico.

The volunteers will be driving 10 refurbished and fully equipped emergency vehicles bound for small towns south of the border that can't afford the equipment.

"It's three times bigger" than the two previous Mission to Mexico trips, said Ed Troyer, the Pierce County sheriff's spokesman and a volunteer with the humanitarian effort. "We just saw the need for it."

The caravan hopes to roll out of Gig Harbor by 7:30 a.m. today. The trip originally was scheduled for May but was postponed because of the swine flu outbreak.

The first mission was hatched four years ago after Gig Harbor resident Jose Lopez returned from a trip to his hometown of Ayutla and recounted to friends a horrifying head-on crash he was involved with.

He'd tried to save five people hurt in the wreck, but because Ayutla had no ambulance two adults and a baby died.

The effort to bring emergency supplies and vehicles to the needy Mexican community was launched.

Lopez, who co-owns the El Pueblito restaurant in Gig Harbor, worked with Troyer and others to gather surplus equipment and raise money.

In September 2007, 12 people drove 3,000 miles from Gig Harbor to Ayutla to deliver three patrol cars, an ambulance and emergency equipment. The team overcame violent storms, bad roads and numerous mechanical breakdowns during the six-day trip.

After the group returned, the members continued to raise money to send additional supplies to Ayutla. They had a firetruck that couldn't be delivered in the first trip. The U.S. Air Force eventually flew the engine to Guadalajara.

The firetruck, rescue equipment, computers, school supplies and toys were delivered during the second Mission to Mexico trip last September. During that excursion, a crew of six dealt with torrential rains, rockslides and a last-minute hang-up with customs red tape.

Organizers hope the third trip goes a little smoother.

"If something happens, it won't surprise us," Troyer said. "We'll be prepared for it."

Twenty-two volunteers will take turns driving four patrol cars, three medic units, a fire command rig, a 50-foot firetruck and a bus to a handful of communities. Each rig is stocked full of equipment.

The caravan will stop in Mazatlan to deliver medical supplies, at an orphanage in Autlan to deliver computers, and in Ayutla to deliver a bus equipped to carry handicapped passengers. Along the way, the volunteers will hand out soccer balls, uniforms and other gear donated by DTI Soccer of Tacoma.

The trip to Mazatlan will be a first. The Mission to Mexico crew will deliver supplies for Kathy Martin, president of The Martin Firm in University Place. She's been taking donated equipment to the resort city for 21 years.

“Half the battle is getting the equipment down there and getting it through customs,” she said.

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Pierce County sheriff’s spokesman Ed Troyer promises to blog and Twitter during the road trip. Find the blog and other information about the trip at [www.themissiontomexico.com](http://www.themissiontomexico.com). The Twitter account is [www.twitter.com/missiontomexico](http://www.twitter.com/missiontomexico).

A News Tribune reporter and photographer chronicled the first two Mission to Mexico trips. Find some of their photos and dispatches on the Lights & Sirens blog ([blogs.thenewstribune.com/crime](http://blogs.thenewstribune.com/crime)) under “Mission to Mexico.”

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