

Detective looks to raise money for humanitarian mission

Proceeds to fund annual emergency vehicle donations to Mexican villages

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Pierce County Sheriff's Det. Ed Troyer and seven volunteers will drive fire engines, ambulances and medic vehicles to Mexico this January.

The five-day endeavor will cover 3,300 miles and cost \$10,000 to \$12,000 in fuel alone, Troyer said.

It may sound tough, but not to Troyer.

"It's tons of fun driving through hundreds of villages and towns along the way," Troyer said.

To pay for the trip, the Mission to Mexico non-profit organization that began with the effort several years ago will hold a Bash for Gas fundraiser on Saturday at El Pueblito Family Mexican Restaurant. The event will feature music from the Michael Crain band and Mojo Overload for a \$10 admission fee. The 21-and-older event will go from 7 p.m. to midnight.

Troyer said this year's trip will deliver six total vehicles — all of which have run the course of their life span by U.S. standards — to three Mexican towns. They also will take other supplies, including hoses, axes and helmets, said retired Seattle firefighter Phil Michelsen, who began the non-profit several years ago with Troyer and El Pueblito staff and family member Jose Lopez.

The equipment is still in mint condition by Mexican standards, said Michelsen, who was a firefighter for 27 years.

"In the states, we recycle through equipment so quickly because the standards change, and the equipment is phenomenal," Michelsen said. "It's fantastic. Up here, it's not up to standards, but it's brand spanking new, and they've never seen anything so good."

Michelsen said he originally got the idea to start Mission to Mexico from Lopez's stories of emergency response from when he grew up in Ayutla, a town in central Mexico.

"Jose told me about a horrific accident on the highway involving a family and an infant child," Michelsen said. "He also told me that he was putting people in the back of a pickup to take them to the hospital."

The response was a no-brainer, Michelsen said.

"It just seemed like there is all this excess of equipment up here — let's get it down there," he said. "So that's how it started."

Sometimes standards change after a year, so the equipment that's replaced often is brand new.

Ayutla has benefited from the donations, which have come to include books and pencils in addition to emergency supplies.

When they cross the border at Nogales on the way south, they will have to provide careful paperwork to document their trip and their gifts. It's a quest that takes careful planning, but it's worth it, Troyer said.

Troyer said his inspiration comes from both north and south of the border.

"I guess it's all the hard work many do up here to make this work happen, and that it's actually saving lives on the back end," he said. "Also, it's helping people take care of themselves, which can be sustained, and it's not a temporary fix."

The size of this year's group is less than last year's group of 20 since they won't be driving police cars to

Mexico, Troyer said. When they did so last year, they were followed by a mysterious helicopter for about 30 minutes, Michelsen said.

Bash for gas fundraiser

When: 7 p.m. to midnight on Saturday.

Where: El Pueblito Family Mexican Restaurant parking lot, at 3226 Harborview Drive in Gig Harbor.

What: A 21-and-older concert featuring local bands, the Michael Crain Band and Mojo Overload.

Admission: \$10, additional donations welcome.

For purchase: Food, margaritas and beer will be available for purchase, supplied by El Pueblito.

On display: The fire engines and medic vehicles the crew plans to donate, plus photos from the towns that will benefit.

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