

December 15, 2010

Orphans visit St. Johns; orphanage needs support

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ST. JOHNS -- John Shinsky made a promise to himself in 1969 -- that he would one day open an orphanage.

He fulfilled that promise in September 2009 when Ciudad de los Niños (The City of Children) opened in Matamoros, Mexico. But Shinsky's involvement and responsibility didn't end there. He and his wife Cindy are dedicated to the on-going task of raising funds to maintain and sustain the facility.

To help with that sometimes daunting task, Ciudad de los Niños has partnered with Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos (NPH, Spanish for Our Little Brothers and Sisters) and its American fundraising arm, Friends of the Orphans.

Recently that relationship led to a very special experience for juniors and seniors at St. Johns High School.

Orphans visit area

Eighteen children and one 19-year-old dorm parent from NPH facilities in Mexico paid a visit to SJHS recently. Each of the children, ranging in age from 12 to 18, was matched with two advanced Spanish students at the high school who served as guides.

The visitors had lunch in the school cafeteria with their student guides. They got personal tours of the school and, most importantly, they presented an assembly of traditional Mexican song and dance as a thank you and to encourage financial support of NPH and Ciudad de los Niños.

"It was one of several school-based performances," said Cindy Shinsky.

The troupe also performed at the Lansing Spanish immersion school and a school in Jackson, according to Shinsky.

A highlight for the orphans was a visit to the migrant program at Michigan State University. They were able to visit the MSU football stadium and field and even go to football practice. And were each presented with an official MSU football jersey.

Ciudad de los Niños opened its doors a year ago, providing a safe place for nine children to live and grow and blossom. That



Photo by Randee Roy
Dr. Ken Ladouceur, superintendent of St. Johns Public Schools attempts some dance steps with one of the orphans that visited St. Johns recently.



Photo by Sammy Madar
Two orphans from Mexico enjoy lunch in the St. Johns High School cafeteria with their guides, two advanced Spanish students at St. Johns High School - Breann Hartenburg (left) and Jennifer Morrow.

initial group of nine children has grown to 37 children in just over a year.

"Our maximum is 45 kids," said Cindy Shinsky.

The visit to mid Michigan was important to the children and to NPH. But John Shinsky wants to share another important message.

"We have had a successful first year," he said. "The success of our project is the success of our community. I appreciate the trust and confidence people have shown us in the project. Their support is making this possible."

John said he is very touched by the fact that they are able to function as a home for these kids.

"We are providing a safe place for them to live and get some balance," he said. "They are now able to see some of the opportunities they have."

Life was very hard

Before going to Ciudad de los Niños, most of these children spent all their energy and time just surviving. Now they can think about the future.

"Now we can zero in on education," said Shinsky. "Good education isn't available in the local schools."

About half of Shinsky's orphans now attend a private school. Others have been able to gain admission to some of the better schools in the area.

But there are others whose basics need work before they will qualify to the better schools.

"We are trying to help our children get a good education so they can ultimately get a degree," he said.

Shinsky said his children have already learned now to survive in a very challenging world, but they haven't yet learned what tremendous potential they possess.

Partnering with NPH will help the children reach those lofty goals. Friends of the Orphans, headquartered in Chicago, provides the fundraising arm of NPH.

How to help

One way people here can support the mission of the Shinskys and Ciudad de los Niños is by sponsoring a child.

There are different levels of sponsorship, starting at \$30 per month.

"Ten sponsors per child covers all of their expenses," said

Cindy Shinsky.

Information on sponsoring a child or making a one-time donation is available at www.friendsoftheorphans.org
