

# SUNDAY NEWS-<sup>SPRINGFIELD</sup> LEADER

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RAINBOW NETWORK

Nicaraguan children attend class in a school supported by Rainbow Network.

## Bringing reality of Nicaragua to light

Rainbow Network's 10th anniversary event celebrates Christians' work in poor nation.

By Linda Leicht

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The corner of Cherry Street and John Q. Hammons Parkway is beginning to look a bit like Nicaragua.

The rudimentary wood shack, feeding center, school and medical clinic are intended to bring the realities of poverty in Nicaragua to the Ozarks, and to show what the Ozarks is doing to help eliminate that poverty.

It's all part of the celebration of the 10th anniversary of Rainbow Network — an Ozarks-based organization that works among the poor in the poorest Central American country.



Jaspers

• **A list of events for Saturday's celebration. 5A**

"It's more than just an anniversary celebration," said Keith Jaspers, area businessman and founder of Rainbow Network. "It's a statement of unity from the Christian community of this area that we just aren't going to tolerate the kind of abject poverty that these people are forced to live with."

Churches and other faith-based organizations will be involved in the anniversary event Saturday, just as they are involved in supporting Rainbow Network.

The daylong event will start with a Partnership Walk in the morning, when organizations and individuals who support Rainbow Network will walk around the perimeter of the Missouri State University campus in a show of unity.

Jaspers calls it a "broad-based proclamation of Christians united to help people suffering in poverty."

At least 15 Christian denominations will be represented in the walk, perhaps the largest interdenominational effort in the area, he said.

See **Rainbow**, Page 5A

## Celebrate Rainbow Network on Saturday

**9 a.m.** Partnership Walk. The 2-mile walk will start and end at First and Calvary Presbyterian Church at Cherry Street and John Q. Hammons Parkway. Support vehicles will be on hand for those who prefer not to walk the entire route around the Missouri State University campus. Walkers are invited to donate a pair of children's shoes to send to Nicaragua. All walkers will receive a T-shirt.

**11:30 a.m.** worship celebration back on the lawn at First and Calvary. Musical guests include a combined children's choir from area churches, Heartland Covenant Worship Team and First and Calvary Praise Band.

**11 a.m.-2 p.m.** free picnic lunch, children's activities, displays of Rainbow Network ministries in Nicaragua. Rock/pop/country band Geezer will perform during the lunch hour.

**1:30-3:30 p.m.** faith and poverty panel discussion, "What does my faith have to do with their poverty?"

**Registration:** Lunch and all events are free, but registration is requested to help with planning. Register online at [www.rainbownetwork.org](http://www.rainbownetwork.org) or by calling 889-8088.

### WANT TO HELP?

**Volunteers are needed** before, during and after the 10th anniversary celebration. To help, go to First and Calvary Presbyterian Church, at Cherry Street and John Q. Hammons Parkway, to inflate balloons, set up tents, cook brats, sort shoes, clean up and more. Volunteers are asked to arrive at 7 a.m.

### To donate to Rainbow

**Network**, call 889-8088; send donations to 3834 South Ave., Springfield, MO 65807 or visit [www.rainbownetwork.org](http://www.rainbownetwork.org).

# 'It's (Nicaraguans') faith that

October 9, 2005 5A

## enables them'

### RAINBOW, from Page 1A

"The success of Rainbow Network has been and will be due in large part to this united, cooperative effort of virtually every denomination in southwest Missouri uniting together," said Jaspers.

### 'IN THE TRENCHES'

In Nicaragua, poverty knows no denomination, but the people who work with Rainbow Network are all "people of faith," said Mark Struckhoff, Rainbow's U.S. director.

"They celebrate God's goodness on a regular basis," said Struckhoff.

Saturday's celebration will include music, food and fun, just as a celebration in Nicaragua would.

"It's an occasion to celebrate when company is coming," Struckhoff said.

Despite poverty that would "cause most of us to fall on our faces and cry out to God," the people of Nicaragua are "standing in faith and celebrating God's presence among them," he said.

"I think it's their faith that enables them and empowers them to be people that celebrate."

When Stephen Limbaugh visited Nicaragua in June, he saw both the poverty and the joy of the people, and he also saw the work that Rainbow Network does to help eliminate that poverty.

"This is an outfit that does wonderful work," said the Missouri Supreme Court justice.

The "fragile democracies in Central America" need help from our government, said Limbaugh, who lives in Cape Girardeau and will be at Saturday's event.

"In the meantime, Rainbow Network is out there in the trenches," he said. "They do a magnificent service."

That service includes nutrition, education, micro business loans, medical and dental clinics, clean-water projects and housing programs — serving nearly 43,000 people in six rural communities.

It is the "continuity of care" between Rainbow Network and those communities that convinced Dr. Will Moore to donate his services to the program.

Moore had been to Central America three times on medical missions before he went with Rainbow Network in March. On previous visits he was frustrated by the "empty feeling" that his work was a temporary, one-time fix.

Working hand in hand with Nicaraguan doctors employed by Rainbow Network was "much more satisfying," said Moore.

He is now involved in getting donations of equipment and supplies for those Rainbow doctors, and he will return in February.

He will also provide a look at what a doctor's office might look like in Nicaragua when he sets up a mock clinic Saturday. The small demonstration will show the limitations, he said, but even the outside display with only a wood table and chairs cannot demonstrate the primitive conditions of its Nicaraguan counterpart.

"I was impressed with how well trained (the doctors) are," said Moore. "But they need equipment."

### HELPING AT HOME

Not all the churches and individuals who are participating in Saturday's event have been to Nicaragua — yet.

Journey Christian Church of Lebanon will set up an example of a small neighborhood shop in Nicaragua. They will sell individual eggs and pencils and small bags of beans. The store is an example of the type of small business supported through Rainbow's micro-loan program.

### • Rainbow Network projects



Guy Lombardo, pastor of Journey, said the church has supported Rainbow Network for five years, but has never sent a mission team there. Members are planning a trip in 2006.

"We felt like they were doing a ministry that is worth supporting," said Lombardo. "It is a Christian effort. It's not evangelical, but it shows the love of Christ by your deeds and your actions."

Fountain of Life Church's Park Avenue Christian School will demonstrate what school is like in Nicaragua, said Elaina Adjoonani, church and school secretary.

Park Avenue students will get their Spanish lessons on the hard benches in the tiny, outdoor classroom, said Adjoonani.

She has never been to Nicaragua, but seeing photos of actual classrooms and helping support Rainbow Network's education programs has affected Adjoonani.

"It has really inspired me to reach out to the less fortunate," she said.

Colin Keller, a senior at Missouri State and a member of the Catholic Campus Ministry, has also been inspired by the work done in Nicaragua. He hopes someday to visit the country.

Keller, 21, is in charge of the ministry's "water stop" along the Partnership Walk.

About halfway through the walk, participants will have an opportunity to stop at the ministry, where they will find plastic cups. Some will be full, others half full or even empty. Labels on the cups will read "contaminated" or "dirty," demonstrating the kind of water available in many areas of Nicaragua.

"We're doing it to raise awareness that not everyone has an adequate water supply," said Keller.

"We're hoping that people will share their water," he said. "That is part of the Christian spirit."

Gary Griffin, pastor of Hood United Methodist Church in Republic, said he saw that spirit grow at his church after the first three members went on a mission trip to Nicaragua about four years ago.

"Since then, it's like a seed that began to grow," he said.

The church has built a replica of a typical, wood and scrap metal Nicaraguan home. The church has sent teams to help build new cinder-block homes to replace those dirt-floor shacks for people in Rainbow communities.

The members of University Heights Baptist Church have supported Rainbow Network since it began, said pastor Michael Olmstead.

The church has sent teams to build houses and dig wells, has sponsored scholarship students, collected school supplies and shoes and raised money for the programs.

Why? "Because they're meeting the real needs of people, and that's what we think Christians should be doing," said Olmstead.

### 'A FRIENDRAISER'

Those attending the Rainbow Network celebration will have plenty of opportunities to learn about how they, too, can be part of that work.

There will be information booths throughout the First and Calvary Presbyterian Church grounds where volunteers will explain all the projects and volunteer opportunities.

"It's not a fundraiser," said Struckhoff.

"It's a friendraiser."

A panel discussion on "What does my faith have to do with their poverty?" will provide an opportunity for people to investigate their own interests and inspirations to service, he added.

Two top Rainbow Network staff leaders from Nicaragua will also be on hand to celebrate the anniversary and talk about the work they do.

Jader Mejia, Rainbow's economic development director, and Nelson Palacios, senior supervisor, will be on hand. With the help of interpreters, the two men will share their experiences working with the poor in their country.

More than 1,000 people are expected to attend the anniversary celebration, from the morning Partnership Walk to the free picnic lunch, entertainment, kids' activities, faith and poverty conference and Nicaragua displays.

Struckhoff knows what he hopes will happen:

"In some ways, the celebration is a way for folks to catch a rainbow in the sky and say, 'Look at that. Look at what God's done.'"

**Rainbow Network helps to build homes for poor families like this one in Nicaragua.** Rainbow homes have cement floors and are built of cement blocks. The homes are typically built in groups of 25 to 30 and have a shared well.

DAVID WILSON



## About Rainbow Network

Rainbow Network is a nonprofit, nondenominational Christian organization that works with the poor in rural Nicaragua. The agency is supported completely by donations.

Started in 1995 by Springfield business owners Keith and Karen Jaspers, Rainbow Network provides a variety of services to communities that partner with the organization. There are now 95 communities participating in six networks.

While Rainbow Network provides

resources and organization, each community is directly involved in its own development, providing the volunteers and leadership needed to make the program successful.

### RAINBOW'S MINISTRIES

**Feeding children.** More than 12 million meals have been served by Rainbow to children and special-needs adults. Feeding centers are generally located in schools, where children can receive a healthy, balanced lunch.

Ill, pregnant and elderly adults are also fed at the centers.

**Family businesses.** More than 11,000 micro-loans have been made to families to establish small businesses. Community banks, made up of about 25 families, administer the loans. The loans must be repaid, with all the members of the bank guaranteeing the loan.

**Building houses.** Rainbow Network has built 435 new homes for families through a program based on, and sometimes in partnership with, Habitat for Humanity. Rain-



**Romona Baker** demonstrates how a Rainbow Network feeding center operates at a representation at First and Calvary Presbyterian Church.

DAVID WILSON

bow houses have concrete slab floors, with concrete block walls, a corrugated metal roof and an outdoor latrine. Each house also has room for fruit trees, a vegetable garden and a play area for children. Typically, 25 to 30 houses are built in a single housing project with a shared community well. The houses cost \$1,500 to \$2,000 and are financed through an interest-free loan.

**Teaching children.** More than 34,000 elementary students have attended Rainbow Network's 301 schools. The high school scholar-

ship program has 1,012 students enrolled this year. Nicaraguan high schools charge tuition and fees, and rural students must travel to a city to attend.

**Healing the sick.** More than 198,000 patients have been treated in Rainbow Network clinics. Rainbow staff doctors and public health professionals work out of each office. Two full-time dentists treat several hundred patients, and an optical program provides eye examinations and glasses for about \$12, and a loan to pay for them.