

Dawson Creek welcomes voyager Eric Blackburn



Contributed photo

Born in B.C., philanthropist and sailor Eric Blackburn now resides in San Juan Del Sur, Nicaragua, with his wife Rosio and their three children, eldest daughter Kaerolik, 11, son Robin, 8, and daughter Erika, 6. Blackburn is the Nicaragua project director for the World Kids Foundation, a non-profit organization he helped to start in 1997.

By Matthew Bains

DAWSON CREEK – The Dawson Creek Rotary Club Sunrise welcomed a world traveler to its morning meeting Feb. 27.

Eric Blackburn, a founding member of the non-profit organization World Kids Foundation and the group's Nicaragua project director, talked to Rotarians about his work in Central America and the need for their support.

Born in Cranbrook, BC, Blackburn spent much of his childhood living abroad with his parents, including in Peru and Iran. His desire to travel persisted as a young adult, and in 1988 at the age of 24 he traveled to the east coast of Africa, where he was inspired by the children there to try to make a difference by bringing school supplies to kids all over the world.

He returned to Canada and worked various jobs to help finance his dream of building his own boat to sail around the world. Sure enough, he spent four years in Cranbrook and over \$60,000 to build a 30-foot sailboat he named "the Chickadee." He would set sail in November, 1995, from Vancouver, beginning the first leg of his World Kids Voyage, with the idea of bringing friendship boxes – shoeboxes filled with school supplies and other items from students in Canada – to kids in Mexico and Central America.

"I wanted to make a difference in my voyage," Blackburn said. "I wanted to leave a little bit of light in my path behind me and help out along the way."

Blackburn stopped in some schools in Southern California, where he found American students wanted to help out too, and with the help of some American Rotarians, the World Kids Voyage expanded into the World Kids Foundation in 1997.

Later that year in December, he delivered the first friendship boxes to the Olive Tree Children's Orphan-

age in Ensenada, Mexico. He was grounded for a while due to the hurricane season, but would continue down the Pacific coast, stopping in El Salvador and Guatemala to deliver more friendship boxes before ending up in Nicaragua. He was actually going to bypass the country, but because of a squall, ended up landing in San Juan Del Sur, and it would change his life.

Blackburn quickly became involved with many humanitarian projects while there. He helped to reforest an area near Cardenas that had been cleared of landmines. He spearheaded a relief effort after Hurricane Mitch flooded the area in 1998. In 1999, he helped build an elementary school the remote village of Cangrejo, and later he was also able to help launch the country's first computer college in San Juan Del Sur, and another elementary school in Veracruz.

Blackburn has been back and forth from Nicaragua and North America since then, but he now has a home in San Juan Del Sur where he lives with his wife and three children. He was back in BC last year, working in the coal mines near Tumbler Ridge to raise some more money and get some paperwork in order, and although he said it was shocking to go from the sunny coast of Nicaragua to the dark coal mines of the Peace, he said he still loves coming to Canada.


"There isn't a day above ground that I'm not very proud to be a Canadian," he said. "We've won the lottery ticket of life by being born in this great country."

Blackburn is set to return to Nicaragua shortly, where he'll continue to work on a number of projects he has started. He is hoping to complete his "Cruising Central America" guidebook of the Pacific Coast for sailors. He also hopes to initiate a cleanup campaign for the coastal areas that have been polluted by garbage. He is still fundraising for the three schools he helped to start, and also hopes to get a sewing center up and running

for single mothers in San Juan Del Sur. He admits there's a lot of work ahead, but he said he's up for the challenge.

"Never be discouraged by the circumstance, or the size of the task," he said.

More information on Blackburn and his voyage can be found at www.worldkidsfoundation.org, where donations to the charity can also be made.



City of Fort St. John

Notices & Public Info

Spring 2009 Community One Stop Registration

Saturday, March 21st 2009
North Peace Secondary School
10:00 am - 2:30 pm


Fort St. John and Area Residents have the opportunity to come to one central location to register in spring/summer sports, leisure, cultural, community and health programs.

Come and check out the *Community Health & Wellness Section* for valuable and informative wellness information

For more information or to book a table:
www.fortstjohn.ca "Community Programs" "One Stop"
 or contact Becky Keim bkeim@fortstjohn.ca 250 787-5780

Registration forms are also available at the North Peace Leisure Pool and City Hall. Deadline for table registration is March 18, 2009.

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