



The Rotary Wheel

There's someone you should meet.

Lisa McCoy is a member of neighbouring Rotary Club of Gravenhurst. Lisa heads up an organization called Rotary Wheels for Learning, whose mandate is to provide free bicycles to the rural children of Cambodia, so they can travel to school. This unique program uses funds provided by Rotary Clubs to purchase container loads of bicycles that are shipped to Cambodia and then a team of Rotarians from our local area travel to there to assemble the bikes and distribute them to the needy.

In the rural areas of Cambodia, schools are few and far between. Young children may live anywhere from five to 10 kilometres away from a school, too far to walk. With teachers' incomes as low as \$100 a month, a bicycle is a luxury few can afford. As a result, many children just don't attend school.

A 19-day working trip to Cambodia, which concluded on Jan. 24, looked to change that, at least for some. A group of 19 Rotary members and friends traveled together from Muskoka - at their own expense - to deliver 1,097 bicycles.

Bracebridge Rotary President Linda said "I had heard Lisa McCoy speak a couple of times to Rotary groups". "I really believe in international service. I'm president of the club right now and one of my personal goals was to lead a hands-on international service project of my fellow friends and Rotarians to do something good in the world."

The group worked since last March to raise over \$50,000, enough for more than 1,000 bikes. It was the largest bike distribution ever for Wheels for Learning. The next largest had been only 180 bikes, but the local group set a goal of first 600, then 1,000 bikes. The Rotary Club of Washago & Area – Centennial contributed \$1200 toward the project: 24 bicycles.

Bicycles were sourced from Southeast Asia and arrived at six distribution points in rural Cambodia, essentially already put together. However, before the bikes could be given out, the visiting Rotary team had to install the finishing touches, including pedals, baskets, lights and bells.

Contacts in Cambodia make the decisions about which children receive the bikes, prioritizing the most needy. But for the group, handing out a limited number of bikes was tough.

"The need is endless, it truly is, because, for instance, at one school we went to we were greeted by 400 beautiful young children and we were only giving away 40 bikes," explained Brouillette, who was among several on the team who were reduced to tears that day. "But Lisa's words to the school were 'we'll be back.'"

"We all have amazing memories of it, good and bad," admitted Brouillette. "Mainly though, the focus for all of us was helping these kids. On the bad days, on the days where you worked and put 300 bicycles together and your hands were covered in grease and you were really hot and sweaty, I think all of us still felt we were doing a good thing and it was worthwhile."

To read the Rotary team's blog recorded during their working trip, visit <http://www.rwflcambodia2012.blogspot.com>. You can also see videos of the children receiving their bikes at <http://www.youtube.com/RotaryWheels4L>.

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