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GET PACKING: A corps of Brampton volunteers pack 3,000 kilograms of tools, typewriters and computers for a trades and technical centre in the Dominican Republic that helps train street kids "who otherwise would be mired in poverty."

Volunteers pitch in for island youth

BY FRANK CALLEJA
STAFF REPORTER

There are young hands in the Dominican Republic eager to learn and work, and a group of Canadian volunteers determined to help them.

That's the mission of folks like Rita and Hans Gautschi of Brampton, who organized local support for a trades and technical centre known as Integration Juvenil that is aimed at street children in Puerto Plata.

Last weekend, a corps of Brampton volunteers, including army cadets, packed 3,000 kilograms of used and refurbished hand and power tools, typewriters, and old computers for shipping to the Dominican.

"The tools and equipment will be used to teach trades and skills to street kids who otherwise would be mired in poverty without a hope of breaking the cycle," Rita Gautschi said.

Program receives widespread support

"Wonderful work is being done at the centre, work that teaches youngsters to believe in themselves, inspires them to create their own work or get a job," she said.

Gautschi said the program has won the support of churches, agencies and businesses, both on and off the island.

"Even the U.S. military is helping us — the 914th Airlift Group in Niagara Falls, N.Y., will receive the shipment, seal it and place it on pallets for transport.

"Then the 928th Tactical Airlift Group from O'Hare air base in Chicago will pick it up and fly it to The Dominican Republic along with other humanitarian shipments," she said.

Quality Van Lines was enlisted to handle the shipment's first leg from Brampton to Niagara Falls.

"Response to this project has been amazing," she said, noting the widespread contributions of six churches and various businesses to collect and repair the old machines for a new life in Puerto Plata.