

By Moises Sandoval

'We'll carry on'

U.S. and Mexico volunteers have brought health services to Mexican Indians for 18 years

Dear friends, we ask nothing for ourselves, fully realizing how greatly we are blessed, but rather for those we see who are not able to make it on their own. The remembrance of the

haunted eyes, frail bodies and terrible illness amidst poverty cannot be ignored. Our resources right now are perilously low but to cease serving is unthinkable. God willing, we'll carry on."

That plea, from the quarterly letter of the St. Jude Express, capsules the agony and the ecstasy, the challenge and hope of a remarkable

St. Jude Express helps children like this one in the Tarahumara region of Mexico's Sierra Madre.



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Photos courtesy St. Jude Express

From left: Express president Greg Donohoe, Mexican doctors Humberto and Patricia Berlanga and Bob Welk.

mission organization based in Albuquerque, N.M. (P. O. Box 5333, Zip 87185). Named after the patron saint of impossible causes because it depends totally on the volunteer work and the charity of many, the Express regularly delivers medical supplies, food, clothing, doctors, dentists and other medical personnel to remote Sierra Madre mission stations serving Mexico's Tarahumara Indians and border barrios in Juarez. Enhancing the reputation of its patron saint, the nonprofit organization somehow carries on.

The volunteers come and go, funds and donations ebb and flow, but for 18 years St. Jude Express has delivered by plane and truck its

cargo of love and hope.

St. Jude Express owes its beginnings to the creative spirit of Pope John XXIII. After he urged in the early 1960s that American bishops send 10 percent of their priests to Latin America, Father Robert J. Kirsch of Albuquerque immediately volunteered, only to be denied permission by his bishop. Undaunted, he and several priests from Arizona and Texas founded the Latin American Mission Program to provide doctors and medical equipment and supplies for missions in the Sierra Madre. By private plane, the group began flying doctors to the region.

In 1966 Ed Young, a pilot and laboratory assistant in Albuquer-

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que, and a friend, Joe Flanagan, flew a planeload of supplies to the village of Sisoguichic. Struck by the desperate needs they saw, Young and Flanagan recruited others. As the flights increased using rented planes, the volunteers decided they needed their own plane. That's when Mrs. Flanagan realized how much money would have to be raised and decided this was a case for St. Jude. And so the Express got its name.

By chance, Young met Ben Raskob of the Raskob Corporation. The Raskob Foundation provided \$1,500 for expenses and, eventually, \$25,000 to buy a plane. With 15 to 17 flights a year, the Express has since worn out two planes besides one wrecked last year at Milipillas. Once a month, Larry and Jose Chavez, John Roybal and Miguel Maestas

drive a truckload of food, medicine and clothing to the Juarez barrios—a 15- to 24-hour round trip.

St. Jude Express is a weekend mission effort. Everyone has another job during the week—Express president Greg Donohoe (an electronics engineer), chief pilot Glenn Elliott, Mexican Drs. Humberto Berlanga and his daughter, Patricia, and many others. Friends in 41 states and two Canadian provinces provide support. But perhaps St. Jude Express is best characterized by Bob Welk, father of eight daughters, who has been with St. Jude since its early days and as medical coordinator "scrounges" much of the cargo sent to Mexico. His enthusiasm undimmed by the passing years, this semi-retired former medical and surgical supply warehouse supervisor and X-ray technician personifies the faith, spirit and endurance of the St. Jude Express. □

To replace the destroyed plane, the Express bought this 1980 Cessna more suited to the rugged terrain.



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