

Horticulture President Contracts 'Bug' That Won't Disappear

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HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.) — Bugs was one of the problems addressed at last week's Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention in Hershey.

But Brooks Way, a fifth generation farmer in Centre County and the newly elected president of the State Horticulture Association, has a bug he can't get rid of.

"There are many bugs you can contract in the Dominican Republic, but the one bug that stayed with me is the mission bug," Way said. "To serve someone else gives us purpose."

At the convention's Women's Auxiliary luncheon, Brooks, his wife Sharon, and daughter Sara, 20, presented a program on their missionary trips to the Dominican Republic.

Several years ago, the Way family took a vacation from their 375-acre farm, where they grow 10 acres of strawberries, 1 acre of sweet cherries, two acres of tart cherries, 20 acres peaches, 80 acres apples, 25 acres sweet corn, and 15 acres pumpkins.

"I'm a full-time farmer," Brooks said of the operation that requires seven to 20 employees depending on the season. All farm produce is sold at three area farmers' markets.

"I didn't want to go to a tourist area," Way said of his decision to visit the Dominican Republic several years ago.

After one trip, the Way family said they were "hooked" and have now participated in three mission trips to the Republic with plans to go again in March.

These visits aren't lay-in-the-sun vacations, but industrious work projects to better the living conditions of the natives.

The visual imagery via slides and the descriptive accounts of the area revealed severe poverty made worst by Hurricane Mitch. About 200 people drowned when a wall of water hit the village. The villagers had only seven minutes warning during the night. Because it was pitch dark, the people didn't know where to go or what to do. Those who sought shelter inside were trapped and drowned in the water. Those who survived did so by clinging to building roofs and trees.

The government refused to let the people rebuilt because the land was condemned as a flood plain. Because they have no place to go, the people stay there and are known as squatters in

the area now considered a ghetto. The villagers add parts to their windowless shacks as they salvage or can afford to purchase them.

"While there, I discovered a reason for roaches," Way said. He recounted seeing a man beating the outside of his house in a morning ritual. The noise brought hundreds of roaches swarming to the outside. The man scooped handfuls of the roaches and flung them to his chickens. As far as Way could determine, that was the only feed the chickens were given.

While there, the Ways visited a dairy farm.

"It was the skinniest group of cows I've ever seen," Way said.

Three cows produced only about one quart of milk during milking time.

The cows' back legs were tied together during milking. Although a strainer hung on a nearby fence post, it was not used during the milking operation. Instead the unstrained milk was sold to a waiting mother.

The Ways were fascinated to see pigs tied to a rope to graze. The pigs seemed content to root in the short patch of ground that the rope's leeway allowed.

In a pen, about 150 chickens had their legs tied together. Whenever someone purchased a chicken, it was dressed while the customer watched.

A few signs of entrepreneurship were evident. A woman erected a small booth outside the medical clinic. In the booth, she cooks a meal and sells popcorn to waiting patients.

In the village, children under two years of age never wore clothing. Sharon said this is probably due to the fact that natives can not afford to purchase diapers.

Unsanitary conditions prevail. Pictures showed a community outhouse located next to the village water supply. The public sewer was a shallow ditch that ran through the area.

Although the village has electricity, it is an unreliable source of energy as it is often turned off for 12 hours at a time. But that doesn't keep the natives from hot wiring electricity from overhead wires.

Typical food fare for all three meals is a dish of rice and kidney beans.

Parents are not legally responsible for their children after 8 years. For this reason, kids roam in the street from morning to night. They basically stay in



Newly-elected president of the State Horticulture Association of Pennsylvania Brooks Way, his wife Sharon, and daughter Sara, left, describe the 'bug' they contracted in the Dominican Republic. The Way family were featured speakers at the Women's Auxiliary luncheon during the Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention.

their own area because the area is territorial. They are not safe if they wander into another area claimed by children's gangs.

Children are not required to attend school. Instead schooling is considered a privilege.

The group going on the mission trip included doctors and dentists who worked from morning to night addressing the many medical needs of the natives. Sara assisted the doctors.

It is the church's groups desire to teach the natives skills that can support them. The American dentists taught one native how to clean teeth and left the needed supplies with him.

On one visit, the Calvary Baptist group helped build a medical clinic. In others, they helped at a boys' orphanage. The 68 boys lived in the most primitive conditions with only the bare necessities. The mission group collected clothing and sneakers for the boys and built wooden lockers for each of the 68 boys to store their possessions.

Amazingly each boy found a pair of sneakers to fit from the donated pairs.

It was the first time most of the children had the opportunity to select clothing, and the Ways described the excitement the event aroused. Each of the boys also painted their plywood lockers using stencils and sponges to print their names and decorate with other designs.

The boys had been fascinated with the few bicycles available. In addition to riding them, they often dismantled and rebuilt the bicycle. Way has collected 27 donated bicycles, which he has dismantled and will ship over for his next visit on March 1. Two motorcycles have also been donated and will be shipped on a cargo plane the church has rented.

"The boys need material stuff, but they also need personal attention," Way said. During previous visits, some of the boys just wanted to be held.

Even in the Dominican Republic, the Way family saw some sights that reminded them

of home. They saw the distribution of canned food in boxes marked Food for Relief, which had been canned in Belleville and Lancaster.

They also saw apples being sold that were shipped from Hess Brothers Fruit Company, Leola.

Apples are in great demand but limited supply. As an orchardist, Way was fascinated to see apples being sold for 50 cents a piece. At this price, few natives can afford to purchase them. The businessman who sells the apples does not want to have more apples shipped in because he prefers to sell them at a high price rather than buy in volume, see the price drop, and sell more.

Unlike the U.S., the richest people are the farmers. But the fruit is exported and natives are not able to purchase it.

When Way went to purchase materials at a hardware store, he noticed many people laughing at him. He was told that the residents consider that only the poorest of the poor wear shorts. By his outfit, he was considered too poor to purchase the items. People who work wear dress clothes even for manual labor.

While the U.S. and the Dominican Republic have different codes of conduct and opposite business philosophies, the Way family has bonded with the villagers. Finding ways to help the villagers has become a way of life for the whole family. In addition to Sara, the parents also have a son Benjamin, 16, and daughter Megan, who is married.

Contributions for the project can be made to Calvary Baptist Church, University Drive, State College, PA 16801; earmark for the Dominican Republic.

