

**By Brian Newsome
The Gazette**

PERALYA, Sri Lanka A man walks through a roofless house stripped bare of its furnishings.

In one room, he's piled salvaged tiles in tidy stacks. In another, he's propped unbroken beams against a wall.

Whether he knows how to roof a home or whether there are enough tiles or beams to do the job is almost irrelevant.

He's trying. Sri Lanka is a country broken by disaster. Bodies are still unburied, rotting in the heat and humidity. Boats line the roads and poke out of the sea like man-made islands.

Amid the aftermath of the Dec. 26 tsunami, people are starting to pick up the pieces.

They cling to friends and relatives who survived. They work side-by-

side with relief workers to rebuild their communities.

"After all they've been through, they're still smiling," said Kevin Donaldson, president of Colorado Springs, Colo.-based Mission of Mercy. "They're still hopeful."

Donaldson of Monument, Colo., toured the devastated village of Hambantota last month and handed out school supplies to children.

Their resiliency surprised him. Children sponsored by Mission of Mercy were killed in the tsunami. Schools that the organization supported financially were destroyed.

In Peralya, on the southwest coast, volunteers arrived in early January to find people perched on stoops with vacant stares.

Now, like the man preparing for home repairs, those people pile loads of bricks as part of a general cleanup effort.

Children play volleyball the court

has a single string for a net and run around. The camp hums with activity.

Down the road, Kulawadhi Antony points out the dirty brown waterline above her home's doorways.

She lost her husband, a daughter and two granddaughters in the tsunami. Two of her surviving daughters lost their homes, and now all live in her home. They sleep on the floor.

Still, they tell their stories without tears. They don't wear the haunted faces of shock seen by television-watchers around the world in the days immediately after the disaster.

In Dodanduwa, a fishing village south of here, fishermen put out their boats at sunset. A few boats remain broken, but many more have been repaired and returned to service.

As boats leave the cove, one man

puts finishing touches on his vessel's repair. When it joins the others, more men will return to work.

These are small things for an island where more than 31,000 died and as many as half a million are homeless. The rebuilding and emotional healing will take years.

At some survivor camps, such as Panichanganei in rebel-controlled land on the east coast, there are no tiles or beams to collect.

Everything is gone. The people sit in the heat and wait.

But the small things are glimpses of what's to come.

Even as the media and some of the early relief workers pull out, entrenched organizations settle in for a lengthy rebuilding process.

Asiana Education Development, which runs schools partly funded by Mission of Mercy, recently opened a school at Panichanganei.

Meeting under a tent, four teach-

ers worked with children to pick up lessons where they left off when the tsunami hit.

Colorado Springs-based Global Action is working with a business that is donating 10 modular homes, said Lal Withanage, the group's director for Sri Lanka.

Global Action is hiring carpenters to repair and build others.

These groups and others like them are arranging for counseling for the survivors, especially children.

Some volunteers are there simply to entertain.

At a camp in Moratuwa, Global Action volunteers lead children in song and dance.

Most children laugh and smile as much as U.S. children, even if those laughs become cries in the night.

Uncertainty abounds, to be sure.

Will the cease-fire hold in a two-

decade civil war between the rebel separatist Tamil Tigers and the government?

Will a country that traditionally has forbidden foreign adoptions reconsider with its swell of new orphans?

Will relief organizations deliver on their promises?

Wayne Francis of San Diego is a Mission of Mercy minister who raises money for the organization as a guest speaker at churches. He visited Sri Lanka to get a look at the devastation.

He said the message he'll take back to the pulpit will be one of hope. And he plans to urge people to help the country recover.

"God is not interested in arm's length compassion," he said.

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**Allison Coffey
Charger Staff**

The motto for the Leo Club is "We Serve," and that is just what the club has been doing all year.

Led by senior Garrett Valdez, all members are expected to receive six individual service credits throughout the year, while also receiving four group credits.

Since the beginning of the school year, the club has been collecting tabs from soft drink cans to donate to the Ronald McDonald House.

The House helps provide hot meals for families, along with laun-

dry facilities and a place to rest.

Donations for this will be taken for the rest of the year and can be taken to Mrs. Jennifer Field's room 229.

Also for the rest of the year, the club will be taking part in Operation 20/20 with the Cookeville Lion's Club.

The purpose of Operation 20/20 is to collect used eye glasses for families who are unable to afford them.

"We hope to collect 400 eye-glasses," said Mrs. Fields. Donations are being accepted and can be taken to room 229.

In February, new service opportunities began.

Leo Club began an ongoing project at Bethesda. Members play bingo with the patients, along with planting flowers in the spring, playing cards and reading.

"Leo Club is also planning on making fleece blankets to be donated to the Genesis House," said Valdez.

Leo Club is just one of many clubs that are focused on bettering the community.

Valdez said, "Leo Club may be small, but we try to remain as active as other service organizations within the school."

**Anna Eisen
Charger Staff**

Cookeville High School's Interact Club, a Rotary-sponsored community service club, will attend a three-day conference in Pigeon Forge on March 4, 5 and 6. The conference includes Interact clubs from Middle and East Tennessee. This annual conference allows Interact members to meet students from other clubs in the district, share ideas and learn about new service projects.

Ms. Sharon Anderson, an Interact sponsor, adds that the conference "is an opportunity to meet

students who share commitment to community service." Members can participate in activities such as a talent show, a club scrapbook contest and the Club of the Year award. The conference also offers various scholarship opportunities for high school seniors. An essay contest and a "senior reverse drawing," in which seniors' names are randomly drawn, award substantial scholarships.

The CHS club founded in 1992 by Mrs. Rosalie Andrews and now sponsored by Ms. Sharon Anderson and Mrs. Nadine Jones.

Local members have been in-

olved in projects including volunteering at Kids Putnam, the Putnam County Animal Shelter and picking up trash around the high school campus.

The club also donated funds to the Heifer Project, an organization that gives livestock to impoverished families worldwide to provide a source of income and better nutrition.

Interact members spend all year helping the community as they strive to make Cookeville and the world a better place, and the Interact Conference is a reward for their hardwork and dedication.



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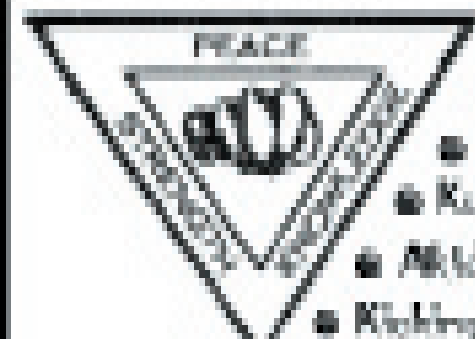


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