Donations from Gothenburg residents, others

Money donated by local folks, businesses, churches and others showed up in the form of a tractor given to Cuban islanders recently.

Mark Peyton and Devin Brundage, who work for Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District, and Carol Shackleton-Skinner, a Gothenburg Family Practice physician, returned with biologists Mark Czaplewski of Grand Island and Felipe Chavez-Ramirez of Houston, TX, to the Isla de la Juventud May 23-30.

In November of 2010, the group and others had traveled to what is known as the Isle of Youth where they repaired damage from hurricanes on the island, including at an ecological reserve.

On that trip, they decided more help was needed and a second journey was planned.

“When we were there two years ago, we asked them what they needed most and the answer was a tractor,” Peyton said. “So we got them one.’

Because roads can become so wet and muddy, he said a truck or jeep would not have been so

useful.

The tractor is now owned by Jose Osirio, the group's contact in Cuba, who works at the reserve.

When the refuge needs the tractor, Peyton said Osirio will operate the equipment and the refuge will pay for maintenance and fuel, which is quite expensive in Cuba because it's imported.

"Other than that, everyone in La Victoria can use the tractor," Peyton said.

In addition to the tractor, the group donated other supplies, including colorful dresses for little girls handmade by members of the First Presbyterian Church in Gothenburg.

Dolls, baseballs, footballs and gently used school supplies from Dudley Elementary were also taken to Cuban families.

Peyton said the group also traveled to a province on the main island to check out other refuges and villages to see what was needed.

"We thought they may need help similar to La Victoria but the the Island of Youth is the end of the line politically, economically and geographically so it hasn't received the attention from the Cuban government that the refuges in Pinar del Rio have," he said.

Chavez-Ramirez also took the group to a place where fall hawk migrations can be monitored.

"We saw some beautiful areas that were off the beaten path," Peyton said.

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