

Mission trip inspires Hlavac, Nicholas

Bruin students create own fund-raiser to help children with school supplies

By JACK CLEMENTS
The Bear Facts

After participating in a school mission trip to Nicaragua through the Amigos For Christ ministry, senior Graham Hlavac and junior Avery Nicholas were deeply moved.

They worked in the poorest parts of Nicaragua, digging ditches and helping families and children. They instantly fell in love with the people and culture; they decided that they wanted to help in any way they could.

“We wanted to make a difference from home,” Hlavac said recently.

And they did just that. First, Hlavac and Nicholas created what they called “Operation Nica,” a fund-raiser to help

children pay for school supplies.

And then Hlavac joined Will Butts, a 2016 Saint Joseph graduate, on a second mission trip to Nicaragua last summer. Just like the first one, the second trip was a powerful experience.

Hlavac’s and Nicholas’ mission work and fund-raiser are just two examples of the outreach efforts from Saint Joseph students and faculty to help others less fortunate. Some choose projects close to home, such as helping local nonprofits.

Others like Hlavac and Nicholas choose international volunteer work – either traveling to Nicaragua or starting their own fund-raiser.

“We felt like the purchasing of school supplies, and building materials

“Hopefully, the money we raise will allow many of them to go to high school.”

– *Graham Hlavac*
senior

for the school would be the best thing we could do to help because it will help to nourish the next generation,” Hlavac said.

“Most of these kids are so poor that their education stops after the sixth grade,” he said. “Hopefully the money we raise will allow many of them to go to high school.”

Operation Nica raised more than

\$1,500 through the sale of T-shirts; that money went to Amigos For Christ. The two plan to continue Operation Nica in hopes of being able to help more people.

In addition to inspiring Hlavac and Nicholas to help, Nicaragua was a real eye-opener for them both. Their spring 2016 trip to Nicaragua changed their outlook on life.

“Nicaragua is the happiest place on Earth,” Nicholas said. “The people are just happy to be alive.

“We don’t realize how much we have until we see people who have so little and are still so kind and so grateful for the little they have,” she said.

During their time there, they were lucky enough to get to go on a house visit.

“This man was so nice and welcoming. We were complete strangers to him, and he did every thing he could to make us feel welcome and even

rode his bike down the street to buy us Cokes. The selflessness of these people amazed me,” Nicholas said.

Hlavac was so moved that he described the trip as the best thing that had ever happened to him. The mission trips even helped to influence his future major of International Studies and a minor in Spanish.

“I can definitely see myself continuing to do this in the future, possibly even as a career,” Graham said, adding that mission trip last year changed the way he lives.

“It’s in the little things,” Hlavac said. “Now when I’m home, I don’t take long showers anymore. I try to conserve water a lot more because I feel guilty after seeing people who will use so little because it is all that they have.

“Also it had influenced me to help – not only in Nicaragua, but to offer help to anyone in need.”