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THE GAY/LESBIAN/BI/TRANS NEWSPAPER & EVENTS CALE

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## Guatemala Humanitarian Trip Planned by Rainbow World Fund

By Dennis McMillan

Published: June 4, 2009

Throng of supporters crowded into the Rainbow World Fund (RWF) Castro office on May 31 for a kick-off party for RWF's 6th annual humanitarian aid journey to Guatemala. The festive gathering was an opportunity for participants on this year's journey to meet with trip alumnus as well as a celebration of RWF's unique and ambitious mission to promote LGBT philanthropy in the area of humanitarian aid;

provide charitable assistance to the larger world community; and serve as a platform for the queer community's compassion and global concern. One can describe RWF as queer compassion in action.

RWF is heading to Guatemala on July 9 through 18. Eighteen people have signed up thus far - with space for two more. Board Member Karen Kai, who visited Guatemala last year with RWF, described the trip as a "crash course" in the history, politics, and spirituality of a developing country. "The trip definitely broadens your worldview. You have the opportunity to dialogue with civic rights workers, sweatshop workers, the mothers of the disappeared, religious and political leaders as well as artists and poets," she said. "By entering into the life of the people and hearing about their struggles, the journey offers an opportunity to begin to understand the prolonged oppression that many communities endure in the developing world."

"I'm looking forward to the trip with the Rainbow World Fund and GATE (Global Awareness Through Experience)," said Brad Lyman, one of the travelers. "I look forward to seeing how previous projects have helped Guatemalans in Guatemala City as well as in remote mountain villages."

"I am going to Guatemala with RWF because I have done a lot of traveling in the Third World, but always as a tourist," said Mark Pressler, another humanitarian traveler. "Even though I meet locals and connect with them, this time will be very different. I hope that I will be seeing Guatemala from the inside, through the eyes of those who deal daily with the poverty, lack of medicine, and education." He said, "Each time I travel to a less affluent country, I am changed from merely seeing it. This time I will be changed because I will experience it."



RWF board member Karen Kai and ED Jeff Cotter. Photo by Rink.

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Highlights of this year's trip include visits to orphanages, medical clinics, water projects, and meetings with members of the LGBT community - along with visiting more traditional tourist destinations. The trip also includes ways to give back. RWF Executive Director Jeff Cotter said they will be taking down 2,000 pounds of medications, medical supplies, and school supplies. Participants are asked to collect medical and school supplies during the months prior to departure. Each person brings at least 100 pounds of supplies. "Over the years, RWF has delivered over 10,000 pounds of life-saving medications and equipment through these efforts," Cotter said. RWF also delivers financial grants to support the work of several aid projects.

While in Guatemala, RWF will also be spending time with a community of Mayan Shamans who they have been helping in collecting the oral history of their communities. Cotter describes this as one more way that RWF is building bridges and changing how the world sees LGBT people. "Besides helping them document their oral history, we are helping the Shamans to develop an educational program to teach other Shamans about LGBT people," he told Bay Times.

Earlier this month, RWF returned from Washington, DC, where six volunteers lobbied on Capitol Hill for US leadership to aid poor countries to adapt to climate change, combat violence against girls, prevent child marriage, reduce global food insecurity, and prevent violence against LGBT people in Iraq. "This was the fifth year we have gone to DC, and it was an incredible opportunity to effect change. Our efforts demonstrate, in a very real, tangible way, that the LGBT community is committed to improving the lives of those less fortunate around the world," said Cotter. Their motto is "One Human Family," which is what their work is all about." He described this year's trip to DC as unique, stating that one could feel the spirit of change that has enveloped the city. Cotter remarked, "We heard from Republican and Democrat leaders alike who stressed that change and the power of having an intelligent and engaged president is vital."

To find out more about RWF's journeys, donating supplies, and how you can support their work, visit [rainbowfund.org](http://rainbowfund.org) or call (415) 431-1485.

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