

Good Neighbours: Students plan Nepal trip to help school

BY JEFF BELL, TIMES COLONIST OCTOBER 9, 2011



Photographer and author Mark Zelinski with some of the books he has donated to help Victoria-based charities.

Photograph by: Darren Stone, timescolonist.com

A group of Belmont Secondary students will have more than Christmas to think about in December.

Eight current students, along with a pair of 2011 grads, are making preparations for a trip to Nepal from Dec. 7 to Christmas Eve. The group is being led by Belmont teacher Troy Harris under the auspices of the Canadian World Education Society, created by Harris in 2007 to support educational opportunities in poor areas of the world.

Harris settled on helping in Nepal after travelling there and being struck by the people's needs. Four years later, a school complex with 17 rooms has been established in a rural area.

Hard work and fundraising have made the school site a reality, and allowed Harris to oversee expansion.

"We can educate from nursery through to Grade 12," Harris said. "Kids never have to leave the village, which is what our goal was."

He has been back to Nepal twice since getting the school project in motion, and is now taking students with him for the first time.

"They're going to teach English, they're going in to have conversational English and they're going to teach about what it's like to be in a Canadian school."

Raising funds has always been an important part of the process for Harris, so a recent gift from photographer-author Mark Zelinski was a big boost. Ontariobased Zelinski was in Victoria to give out books chronicling his travels, offering them to select organizations like the Canadian World Education Society.

"I printed an extra 7,000 to donate specifically to children's charities," he said.

"Having travelled for 35 years around the world I've seen a lot of deprivation, and it's children that are the most vulnerable."

The books can be used as prizes in fundraising ventures or however else recipients want. Zelinski said he distributed about 1,000 books in Victoria and Vancouver.

On the web: canwes.org.