

Powering up ...

Locally based I-Tec team returns from missions in Peru, Ecuador

By ERIC LONG
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It still has the same mission, but it's operating under a new name and in a more efficient manner.

I-Tec, formerly known as Tech Serve International, will continue to help missionaries and others in need around the globe, according to Tom Garber of the Montoursville area, founder and president.

"Our whole work team went to Peru and my wife Linda and I went on to Ecuador," he said of the team's most recent trip. The group returned to the United States about a week ago.

He said the name change to I-Tec occurred at the beginning of the year.

"With as big as we are on electrical projects, we felt we could operate that more efficiently out of our office in Pennsylvania," Garber said. That office is at Route 864 and Green Hollow Road, near Farragut.

"We can also now receive donations right here at our office and send out receipts. With all the work we did with Hurricane Katrina and Rita victims, it was difficult for people here to donate to those efforts. Now, they can send donations directly to us."

Tech Serve had operated out of three offices, with one in Lycoming County, one in Florida and one in Arkansas. Now I-Tec operates from the Montoursville area facility and concentrates on electrical concerns, helping missionaries, orphanages, hospitals and other not-for-profit entities, serving mainly in Third World countries.

"Support of those entities will remain our main thrust," Garber said. "We have been supporting them with technical expertise in quite a few different areas."

Now, I-Tec is planning and doing work in Peru, while also looking to go to Papua, New Guinea in the not-too-distant future.

"The visit to Ecuador (Feb. 4-9) was a contact trip with a hydro-electric supervisor who will work with us on a potential hydro plant in Papua," Garber said.

"We have two locations there, one in the highlands, in the mountains near Goroka and one on the island of New Britain. The one plant in Goroka is for the mission organization ABWE (American Baptists for World Evangelism) and the other, in New Britain, is for the Wycliffe Center and that project is a potential hydro-electric plant."

That plant will help New Tribes Missions in east New Britain he said.

Garber noted that many of these places only have electrical service for a few hours per day, if at all. The hydroelectric plants not only help missions, orphanages and hospitals connected with missions groups, they also help the local villages by supplying them with fairly reliable electric service.

"The one in New Britain is for a low-voltage electric system that needs rebuilt," Garber said. "We will leave for that mission about March 21."

Garber also visited a 2 megawatt hydroelectric plant built and operated by Herald Christ Jesus Blessings ministry, near Quito, Ecuador.

Garber said such mini hydroelectric plants are becoming a viable option in countries where the national power system is weak.

The I-Tec team visited Pucallpa, Peru, from Jan. 25 to Feb. 4. Its staff worked on installing four high-voltage transformers and nine spans of wire.

"We were working along a tributary to the Amazon River and it was at flood stage," Garber said. "There is a ministry, TEC (Technology Evangelism and Christian discipleship) which is a school and they train men in mechanical, carpentry and computer skills."

There, technicians from Pennsylvania and Alaska installed new electrical equipment for the ministry, despite 120-degree temperatures in the South American summer.

"We will go back there again and we got contacted by another ministry there, so we expect to go back there again next year," Garber said.

While in Peru, women who were part of the team, including local residents Linda Garber, Gladys Dudley and Angie Howard (Bennett) helped with painting,



During a recent mission to the remote Pucallpa, Peru area, members of an I-Tec mission team helped work on electrical service. At right, workers prepare new electrical lines while high water from a local river makes conditions challenging. Above, female members of the I-Tec team make their way by dugout canoe to another local village to minister to women there. Tom Garber, founder and president, said volunteers are always needed for technical and non-technical volunteer work. At lower left, Paul Kinley, left, and electrician Matt Wilson, both of I-Tec guide a generator as it is loaded onto a service bucket truck at I-Tec near Farragut on Wednesday. The truck and generator are on their way to the World Gospel Mission School in Catacamas, Honduras.



PHOTOS PROVIDED



MARK NANKIN/Sun-Gazette

sewing and visiting a local village to minister there, traveling by way of dugout canoes.

"We're going to be involved in local and international disaster relief as a part of a change in our operations," Garber said.

"We took generators down to the Gulf coast, to Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi and installed generators at churches that were being used as relief centers."

Those efforts helped in the aftermath of the hurricanes there and there is still a need for generators in that region as recovery continues. He said I-Tec sent two truckloads — 35 generators — most of them large enough to run whole relief centers.

Two of them came back and were then sent to missions in Sudan and Kenya where they were needed.

But such equipment costs money.

"A 50-kilowatt generator runs \$8,000 to \$10,000," Garber said. "They are diesel powered, good used generators.

New ones would cost about \$25,000."

Several local churches have been donating to I-Tec and Garber said other organizations have made donations to help defray the costs of purchasing several 12 kilowatt propane generators.

"We have several units now that we can use for emergencies," he said.

Financial support is important to I-Tec so it can continue its unique ministry.

"We want to be able to respond quickly and having donations come here enables us to respond to things more quickly," Garber said.

He said local contractors or individuals who want to help the ministry by going on missions trips can donate their skills and time as well.

More information is available by calling I-Tec at 433-0777, or writing to I-Tec, 23 Green Hollow Road, Montoursville.

By ROSE FRENCH
Associated Press Writer

BRENTWOOD, Tenn. — Brian Sims was sitting in traffic when a car with a booming stereo pulled up next to him.

Feeling vibrations from the pulsating vehicle, the Baptist pastor who ministers to the deaf got an idea: creating a one-of-kind church exclusively for deaf people.

Today, the Brentwood Baptist Deaf Church has more than 30 speakers beneath the

floor so congregants can feel the vibration of the music.

Many churches provide sign language for deaf and partially deaf worshippers, but this church in a Nashville suburb is unique because it was built specifically with a deaf ministry in mind.

"There is a hearing church, basically, on every corner, but there's not really any place like this," Sims said. "It's a place where the deaf know, 'This is for me; that it meets their needs,'" Sims said.

The church has a loop sys-

tem, which allows anyone with a hearing aid to tie into the sound system with the flip of a switch.

Each seat also is wider to give church members more space to communicate in sign language.

The Southern Baptist church has about 150 people who attend, with Sunday services that are now simulcast for 600 to 700 people in 16 locations across the country.

Sims said he wants the church to become a training

ground for deaf pastors and church leaders, because most seminaries currently require deaf students to have their own interpreters and most can't afford such an expense.

The church held a pilot conference last year to train deaf pastors and leaders, with about 100 people from around the Southeast attending. A national conference is planned for this fall.

Texas architect Cynthia Stiles, who designed the church, said she couldn't find any structure like it as she

was in the planning stage.

Stiles, who also is deaf, said she knew having a clear line of sight to the altar area as well as good lighting and music were crucial in the church design.

Often, churches that have interpreters for the deaf have carpets and pews which deaden vibration. Large pillars and other obstacles can obstruct views of the altar, and too many windows can cause a glare.

"If you're a deaf person, I think it makes the service

more meaningful to be able to feel the music from the floor," Stiles said through an interpreter. "The (violet) coloring from the walls make it easier to see. The acoustics are easier to understand the message and to communicate better."

The National Association for the Deaf estimated in the late 1990s that there were only about 1,000 mainly deaf congregations nationwide for the nearly 30 million deaf and partially deaf Americans.

(See TENNESSEE, PAGE D-2)

Tennessee church takes a lead role in ministering to deaf people