

# Ancaster man teams up to help Dominican youth play baseball

**Mike Pearson, Ancaster**

(Dec 15, 2006)

An Ancaster man working to improve baseball in the Dominican Republic is planning to partner with an American charity with similar interests.

Mike Smith visited a small town near Santo Domingo last month where he dropped off more than 100 pounds of gently used clothing and baseball equipment. It was one of several trips he has made recently to the island nation. On each trip, Mr. Smith sets a goal to outfit a full baseball team. In the past, he has received assistance from Ancaster Little League as well as individual donors.

Mr. Smith recently received a call from Steve Pindar, an American man who also collects donated baseball items for under privileged youth in the Dominican. Mr. Pindar found out about Mr. Smith's efforts by reading an online edition of The Ancaster News. Mr. Pindar is a partner in a charity called Roberto's Kids, which also contributes to recreational youth baseball in the Carribean.

"He's great," said Mr. Smith of his American colleague. "He's given me excellent contacts and the addresses of organizations down there that can help."

Partnership plans are still in the preliminary stages. Mr. Smith and Mr. Pindar plan to meet in person sometime in January when they both plan to return to the Santo Domingo area.

"I just know (Mr. Smith) is very excited to find us," said Mr. Pindar. "He can collect items and has storage space for projects in Ontario. I just think it's wonderful we have an opportunity to make the program international."

Mike Smith is just one of several contacts north of the border who have shown interest in Roberto's Kids. A Brantford man has volunteered to be the coordinator for Ontario. A Brantford baseball league is considering supporting the organization and a woman in Toronto who operates a girls baseball league plans to donate equipment.

On Mr. Smith's latest trip to the country last month, he visited two small towns near Santo Domingo, bringing clothing to a local orphanage along with some baseball equipment. He also found time to see a winter league baseball game. Many big league stars use the Dominican winter league for off-season conditioning. Although Mr. Smith didn't recognize any big leaguers, he did see a few Lamborghinis and Ferraris, presumably driven by millionaire major-leaguers.

Mr. Smith is currently looking for a condo in the Santo Domingo area to set up a permanent base. That would allow him to carry more cargo on each trip back to the country. Back home, Mr. Smith is a firefighter at Hamilton International Airport. He also teaches firefighting at Seneca College in Toronto.

On his last flight to the Dominican, Mr. Smith took about 100 pounds of donated goods.

"The airlines are nice. I tell them it's only going one way and I'm coming back with just a duffel bag," Mr. Smith said.

Mr. Smith has become a good friend of a local Dominican woman, Delfina Connor. Ms. Connor has been instrumental in putting Mr. Smith in touch with people and organizations in need of assistance.

On his latest trip, Mr. Smith met a local eight-year-old girl who owned just two pairs of pants and one shirt. She had also never attended school.

Ms. Connor told Mr. Smith about the girl just before last month's trip back to the Dominican. Mr. Smith returned with a bag of clothes donated by his nine-year-old niece, including 15 shirts and seven pairs of pants. The donated items were greatly appreciated.

"It was like this kid won the lottery," Mr. Smith said.

Overall, Mr. Smith said he witnessed high levels of poverty in the country, but said most Dominican people are able to survive without many of the material possessions people in Canada take for granted.

"There is a lot of poverty - but are they unhappy? No, they're happy people," Mr. Smith said.

Mr. Smith would like to thank his sister and the rest of the Smiley family of Mount Hope for their contribution to his latest trip.

Roberto's Kids is a collaborative effort between the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame, Luis and Roberto Clemente, Jr., and two individual supporters of the Baseball Hall of Fame, Steve Pindar of Oneonta, N.Y., and Steve Tremiere of Newtown, Pa.

Roberto's Kids strives to deliver new and gently used baseball equipment to children in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, with hopes of reaching youngsters in other Latin America countries, including Venezuela and Mexico.

The organization is named for Roberto Clemente, a major league right fielder elected to the hall of fame posthumously in 1973. He played 18 seasons with the Pittsburgh Pirates from 1955 to 1972.

Mr. Pindar first visited the Dominican Republic in 1997 along with a church mission team. He has returned several times since, often visiting the home town of Baltimore Oriole slugger Sammy Sosa.

Mr. Pindar started his baseball equipment project in 1999 in the Dominican Republic with a single donation from the Oneonta Little League. In 2005, the Pindar family collected five tons of equipment for Dominican children from organizations across the U.S.

To donate to Mike Smith's next trip, contact 905-648-8534. For information on Roberto's Kids, send an email to [info@robertos-kids.org](mailto:info@robertos-kids.org).