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## **Oneonta man collecting baseball gear for children**

By Jack Mazurak

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ONEONTA, NY — Amid the national hype of the Yankees-Red Sox baseball playoff series, a local man is helping tend to those who could be the sport's future.

All summer, Stephen Pindar of Oneonta has been collecting boxes of donated baseball equipment. Now, he and his wife, Lisa, are completing arrangements to ship those boxes to the Dominican Republic.

Pindar said he hoped to ship the equipment by the end of this month or early November.

The Pindars have done mission work in the Dominican Republic since 1997, and Stephen Pindar said he's seen children using more creativity to play than actual baseballs and bats.

[an error occurred while processing this directive]The recruiting effort paid off — 15 teams from states as far as Florida and Illinois came through. Pindar said last week he is running out of room in his storage area.

"I won't have the final tally until the rest of the shipments arrive," he said. "But at this point, we believe we have hundreds of hats, uniforms, bats, balls and so on."

In order to ship and distribute the equipment, Pindar connected with Esperanza, an international economic development agency.

Noel Nielson, public relations manager with Esperanza in the Dominican Republic, said the agency's resources will help identify youth who could use the equipment.

"(Baseball) was brought here by the Cubans around the turn of the century," he said. "Later, as the Dominican Republic was occupied by the U.S. Marines, they played a lot too."

He said baseball took hold in sugar-mill towns where each mill had its own team. Now, almost every major-league team has an academy in the Dominican Republic to develop talent.

But even with that attention, lots of children play without much equipment, Nielson said, and the Pindars' donation will help improve the situation.

With a grant through the Baseball Tomorrow Fund, Esperanza is building three ball fields in the Dominican Republic. One, which is nearly complete, is scheduled for inauguration the first week of December.

The Pindars and their 9-year-old son, Christopher, plan on attending that ceremony.

The equipment the family has collected will be used for the children who will play on the new field, Pindar said. As well, some of it will be distributed in other communities.

These donations are the Pindars' second inning. In 1999 they collected local gear and brought it to the Caribbean nation.

Pindar said he'd always felt those donations could be expanded.

"And with the assistance of Cooperstown Baseball World," he said, "that happened this summer."