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Fundraiser for disaster relief



Photo by Carmen Pauls Orthner

Peggy Plunz and a prospective customer look over a skateboard that was available at a bake sale/garage sale at Kikinahk Friendship Centre last week to raise funds for disaster relief in southeast Asia. Organized by Hannah Robillard, the sale raised \$1,300 for the cause, which the federal government will match.

Northern pilots, families ride out effect of tsunamis

When it came to surviving the terror of the massive waves that swept the coasts of southeast Asia and killed more than 150,000 people last Dec. 26, geography was what counted.

For one couple, that meant a five-storey apartment building and a plane in the air.

Mike Habel and his wife, Jennifer Wyatt, spend their summers in La Ronge working for Saskatchewan Environment: he as a water bomber pilot, she as a parks employee at Nutpoint Campground.

The couple winter in Rossland, B.C., but for the last three years they have spent three months of the year in the Maldives, a chain of 1,200 islands in the Indian Ocean. Habel and several other La Ronge pilots are employed seasonally by Maldivian Air Taxi (MAT) to fly tourists from the main island of Male to outlying resort islands.

On the evening of Christmas Day back in La Ronge, Jennifer's mother Heather Wyatt checked her e-mail and found a note from her daughter: in her apartment in Male, 11 time zones ahead, Jennifer had been awakened at 6:30 a.m. by her bed shaking. To the younger Wyatt, who had worked previously in Japan, earthquakes were nothing new. "She said (in her e-mail), 'wouldn't you know it, another earthquake,'" Heather Wyatt recalled two weeks later.

The next morning local time, Wyatt woke up early to finish preparations for the Sunday service at the La Ronge United Church, where she pastors. Her phone rang, and it was a friend inquiring about Jennifer and Mike's location; when told, the friend urged Wyatt to turn on her television.

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La Ronge
Ice
Wolves



v. the
Melfort Mustangs
Jan. 18, 7 p.m.
Mel Hegland Uniplex

La Ronge's
minor hockey
teams are back
in action ...
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Photo by Carmen Pauls Orthner

Blankets, boots and shoes were among the many items on sale at a disaster relief fundraiser last week. The sale raised \$1,300.

Northerners dodge disaster

But now help deal with the aftermath

Continued from page 1

Fortunately, Wyatt didn't have time to panic, for as soon as he heard the news, her husband Bob checked their e-mail and there was another note from Jennifer: although relatively close to the coastline, the apartment building had survived both the earthquake and the resulting tsunamis. The island's concrete sea wall is being credited for significantly reducing the damage to the island.

Jennifer didn't yet know of her husband's condition, but soon afterwards got a text message from Mike on her cellphone, saying he had been in the air when the waves hit, and thus safe.

In the Maldives, the tsunami waves did not reach the 30-metre heights that brought so much devastation to other areas, and the reported death toll in the region is just under 100, as compared to the staggering 80,000 in the province of Sumatra, Indonesia.

However, there was still a great deal of damage, as the couple discovered in the coming days. Mike's duties shifted from transporting tourists to doing medevacs and carting visiting officials as well as supplies of medicine, food and medical equipment. Many islanders and tourists were brought over to Male and relocated in local schools, which had been converted into evacuation centres. Jennifer helped round up diapers, baby food and water for the evacuees.

According to news reports this week, the Maldivian government says that the impact of the tsunami has set back development by two decades, with 53 of the country's 199 inhabited islands suffering severe damage and 20 considered to have been totally destroyed. Nineteen of the country's 87 luxury resorts were severely damaged and will be closed for many months.

Both Jennifer and Mike are doing fine physically, aside from head colds that Wyatt suspects may be a result of the stress they've been coping with for the last two weeks. They are also grateful that their Maldivian friends are

okay. Communication has continued via e-mail, and the Wyatts have been able to phone in a couple of times, although Jennifer and Mike haven't been able to place outgoing calls.

Although she is deeply grateful that her children are safe, Wyatt still finds herself struggling with the aftermath of the disaster.

"What I find difficult is, I know they're fine, but you see all the terrible things that are happening... (and) you almost feel guilty to have things to be grateful for but so many good people have died and there's no rhyme or reason to it, it's just where you were at the time," she said.

As a pastor, she also mourns the fact that because of the sheer thousands of sudden deaths in a hot climate, so many of the bodies must be cremated or buried in mass graves with no opportunity for their families to say a proper goodbye. "They've been through such a horror, and then they're not able to give their loved ones a ritual of burial," she said. "I find that very disturbing."

She is, however, grateful to see the attention that is being paid to the disaster, as well as the outpouring of generosity toward the tsunami victims. "Unfortunately, disasters happen all the time, and when they're so far away, we tend to lose interest right away," Wyatt said. This time, at least, things seem to be different — and it's hard to say why: the scope of the disaster, perhaps, or the fact that North Americans and Europeans were affected as well, or even the fact that it happened right after Christmas, "when we think of family and happiness and joy, and people are a little more attuned to the needs of others."

Whatever the cause, the generosity is certainly evident in La Ronge, where a bake/garage sale organized by local resident Hannah Robillard last Saturday raised approximately \$1,300 for the Red Cross. That money will be matched by the federal government. Donation boxes have also been showing up in businesses and offices all over town.

"I hope it continues, because... this is not going to be a quick fix," Wyatt said. "It will take many generations to repair the damage."

Carmen Pauls Orthner, for The Northerner

New Year's Baby



The 2005 New Year's Baby at the La Ronge Health Centre is little Alyssa Rose Marie, born to Mary-Lou Tsannie of Wollaston, on January 2nd at 5:15pm. Standing with mom and baby, left to right: Bonnie Scott, Amanda Preymack, and Esther Huxted.

A great big thank you goes to the following businesses and groups from baby, mom and Health Centre liaison staff:

Harbour Pharmacy

Fields

True Value

The Dollar Store

Nursing staff at Lac La Ronge Indian Band

Catholic Women's League

La Ronge Medical Clinic

La Ronge Drugs

Nurses and LPN's at La Ronge Health Centre

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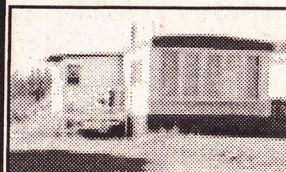
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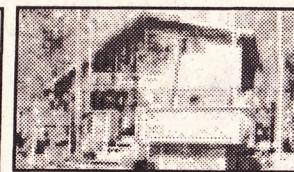
LA RONGE PROPERTIES

Dave Longpre

425-9282



Priced to sell, this mobile needs some TLC. Give us a call. Ideal for a handyman. Asking \$29,900.



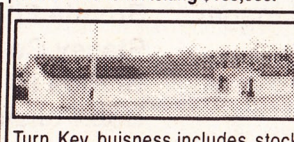
Titled lakefront winterized home at Wadin Bay. This home has lots of charm and a peaceful setting. Don't miss out on your piece of lakefront. Asking \$185,000.



Very well kept home. 3+1 bedrooms, brick feature wall c/w fireplace in basement. Large open kitchen and very large living room. Asking \$98,500.



Ideal family home with lots of room, fireplace in living room, newer detached garage, close to park and schools. \$106,900.



Turn Key business, includes stock fixtures, living quarters. This is a great opportunity to get into a business in a dynamic neighborhood. Lots of potential to grow. \$129,900.



Recently renovated, this home has laminate flooring in living area with large kitchen that opens on to a covered deck. Basement is finished with a bachelor suite. Heated garage, fenced lot with privacy. Asking \$95,500

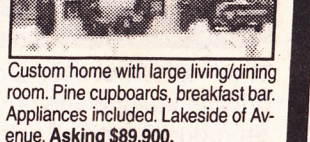


Beautifully renovated 3 bedroom home with double attached garage. Situated on 1.5 acres of land within walking distance to schools. Safe and quiet with lots of privacy, a must see. \$175,990.

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Custom home with large living/dining room. Pine cupboards, breakfast bar. Appliances included. Lakeside of Avenue. Asking \$89,900.



Very well kept home. This 16 x 80 mobile is 2x6 construction, attractive lot, fenced and in great shape throughout. Asking \$77,900.

Located beside The Northerner on La Ronge Ave.

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