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News

## Student inspires teacher

### Warren 11-year-old and his fifth-grade teacher help Ecuador orphans

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By Frank DeFrank, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

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Sometimes, the pupil becomes the teacher.

Jose Chapa, who's about to enter the sixth grade at Great Oaks Academy in Warren, made his second trip to Ecuador this summer. This time, he took along his fifth-grade teacher, Nicole Quandt, and soon-to-be sixth-grade instructor, Donna Gaulin.

And the two instructors discovered that life's lessons can be delivered from unexpected sources.

"(Jose) was in my classroom last year," said Quandt, 27, a Rochester Hills resident and teacher at the academy for three years. "He was very excited about it. And I wanted to do something that was outside my comfort zone."

Gaulin, 47, of Sterling Heights, was similarly motivated by the 11-year-old who'll be in her class this fall.

"(Teaching) is more than a job," Gaulin said. "It's about giving back ... Doing something like this was on my 'bucket list.'"

So the two teachers, along with their young student, joined a church group that traveled to Ecuador for two weeks to live and work among the citizens of that nation. While in Ecuador, Quandt, Gaulin and Jose laid bricks as part of a construction project on an orphanage.

Both were amazed, and even touched, by what they witnessed in an area where animals, including burros, roosters and pigs roamed freely and abject poverty reined.

"It was very eye-opening," Quandt said.

"Where we stayed was really Third World to us," Gaulin added.

But the teachers noticed something else. Despite conditions most Americans would find deplorable, the Ecuadoran children always seemed to smile.

"We went down there to bless them and we were the ones who were blessed," Gaulin said.

The trip was organized by Extreme Response International. On its Website, the group describes itself as a non-profit humanitarian aid organization committed to meeting the needs of people living in extreme situations.

"We focus on orphans, refugees, dump dwellers, and people in extreme poverty," the Web site reads. "We provide help and

hope to those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, and those who lack clean drinking water, education, and medical care."

Jose's first trip was inspired by his mother, who made a similar humanitarian sojourn three years ago. When he saw how much fun she had, he signed on and went his mother on a subsequent trip. This year, he invited his teachers.

For the second year, Jose will have a unique tale to tell when he's asked, "What did you do on your summer vacation?"

"It was lots of fun," said Jose, a Madison Heights resident. "I like going there and sharing the happiness with the other kids."

Not to mention his teachers.

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