

## THE PAGE THREE STORY

# Local residents to build a home in Peru for those less fortunate

*Pure Art Foundation and first-time volunteers embark on a constructive adventure of a lifetime*

**James Parry**  
 Your Local Journal

As of Monday next week, a group of 17 people will be in a remote tropical rainforest village in Peru recently devastated by torrential floods. They will be there to build a home, courtesy of a Saint-Lazare couple and their family, and an initiative of the Hudson-based Pure Art Foundation. In this exclusive interview, the Foundation's co-founders Robert McKinnon and his wife, Brigitte, explain how it all came together.

**Q: What exactly is The Pure Art Foundation?**

It is a registered Canadian charity dedicated to relieving poverty around the world with particular emphasis on educating children, providing shelter and clean drinking water, and improving health care.

**Q: What are its objectives and priorities?**

Currently, we have four main areas of commitment. The Children's Contribution Program whereby \$100 donations pay for uniforms and supplies for school-age children, providing the gift of education for each child for an entire year. To date there are 233 youngsters attending school in the Pure Art program.

Our H2O "Health to Offer" program helps create freshwater wells that provide clean water for families in remote areas and, to date, there are five wells built in the region of Pucallpa.

Our CAST "Construct A Structure Today" program focuses on building new homes to replace dilapidated structures where families live. There are now seven Pure Art homes in Peru - five already built and two under construction - plus one medical clinic.

And then there is the Namaste (Breast Cancer) Support Program for which funds are raised through the sale of tote bags to enable women to take part in the race to end breast cancer.

**Q: Who actually founded the Pure Art Foundation?**

It was established only three short years ago by the McKinnon family for whom it is a total commitment. For myself, my wife Brigitte, and our five sons Sebastian, Benjamin, Samuel, Liam, and Renault. Our philosophy is simple. We all play a role in making this world a better place and our objective is to bring meaningful, sustainable change to people living in remote areas of the planet where few, if any, programs exist. Our mission is to engage with the people locally, learn from them what is really required, and build

programs to transform every penny into lasting results.

**Q: Can you elaborate on the role of your family?**

Brigitte embodies the true inspiration of Pure Art. She is fully dedicated on a full-time basis and very hands-on. All of the five boys are equally committed and engaged in the evolution of Pure Art. They take on various roles in the running of the foundation and, along with myself, provide a supportive role for all of its endeavours.

It is extremely important to our family, evolving from the simple idea of our children helping other children a world away. By engaging in this collaborative community experience, they have been stretched and will never be the same.

**Q: Where, and how, does the Hudson Pure Art Boutique fit in to all this?**

Good question. And an important one. The boutique on Main Road is where community supporters can shop with a purpose. Profits from the sale of artistic items in the boutique are sent to the Foundation to support community projects in the areas where Pure Art is currently focused. This enables every penny that is donated to the Foundation to be passed along directly to the people who need it most.

What's more, it is not only a place to pick up one-of-a-kind artistic items to support artisans around the world, but also a place to become informed of all that needs to be done, and how one family in Hudson is doing their part to hopefully inspire others to engage in meaningful activity. It's just a start.



PHOTO BY ROBERT MCKINNON

Two children in Pucallpa, Peru.

**Q: How long have you been planning this trip and who was invited?**

We have been planning this trip to the frontier town of Pucallpa for about one year now and this time we opened it up to anyone in the community who would like to join us, as long as they were over 18 and agreed to pay all of their expenses for travel, as not one penny of Foundation funds are utilized for traveling expenses at anytime, for anyone.

**Q: And what is on the program?**

The principal objective is to build a Pure Art home for a family in great need of shelter, providing a certain dignity. The group will also take part in the inauguration of the next Pure Art fresh-water well and visit the Pure Art school children enrolled this year in Pucallpa. Interestingly, the house being built this year is actually supported by area resident Robert Bracken and family who decided this Christmas to pool their resources and commit to funding its construction..

**Q: How many trips have you organized to date and what have they accomplished?**

This is our fourth trip to Peru in as many years. Each of the previous three trips opened our eyes to a more in depth appreciation for what is really needed in this part of the world.



PHOTO BY JAMES PARRY

Off to Peru tomorrow, Robert and Brigitte McKinnon, their sons, and all the volunteers who will be building a home for a family in need.

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The first was focused on the children, the second on fresh drinking water, and the third on establishing a medical clinic. Now successfully maintaining these projects, our focus will be on building this new home and maintaining the other programs while we seek out new houses to build for others less fortunate.

However, this is the first trip where we are taking volunteers from the community and everyone is very excited about what this adventure may bring.

**Q: How many people are participating this time around?**

There are 17 people boarding the plane as the first Pure Art Team of this size to reach Peru. All there to willingly lend a hand in Pucallpa. We already have six people confirmed for next year's trip.

**Q: And what can they expect?**

Well, it's certainly not a holiday. But rather a working trip to the jungle at this time of year. And especially with the weather the way it is right now, it will challenge even the hardest traveller. Pucallpa is not even in the guide books, nor considered a tourist destination.

In essence, it is a one-week expedition into this Amazonian Basin frontier town to provide as much help as possible and add a little more to the lasting infrastructure which is taking shape there, thanks to other Canadians dedicated to this task.

Some of the volunteers are returning home at the end of this first week, while others have decided to stay on a second week to visit Machu Picchu while in Peru. This part of the trip is optional, and again, is planned independently and completely at their own expense.

During this second week, the Pure Art team will be involved in scheduled meetings with artisans and suppliers in the Peruvian highlands around Cusco in an effort to bring new items back to the Pure Art Boutique in Hudson in order to raise more funds for the next community project for the people of Peru. Time well spent.

**Q: So everyone pays their own way?**

Absolutely. Again, it is important to point out that not one penny of Foundation donations are used to cover costs of travel or related expenses for any traveller, including Pure Art members, at any time. Also that not one dollar from the Pure Art Boutique profits are used for such expenses either. However, some funds from Pure Art Boutique, for example, will be used to provide necessary clothing for local Peruvian families who have been sadly affected by the current floods in the area.

**Q: You mention that the Foundation has received great support from the community at large. From whom and in what way?**

So many people in Hudson and surrounding areas already give so much of themselves to worthy projects all over the world. "Giving back" seems to be a mantra of many in this community and we all engage in different ways. As for this part of the world in Peru, our Hudson community already includes several people who have been providing substantial financial support to Peru for many years, and specifically to this area of Pucallpa, where we will be working.

Father Roland Demers and Father Mario Marcello of St. Thomas Aquinas Church, for example, have been instrumental in helping us focus on the families in most need, through their colleague Father Gerald Veilleux living in Pucallpa for over 35 years. Indeed, Father Gerald, originally from our area, is instrumental in ensuring many projects are kept running smoothly once Pure Art returns home, and this is critical to our success in this area.

What is most inspiring lately have been the many people of the Hudson community and surrounding area who have taken time to stop by and visit the Pure Art Boutique in the former Legg's building across from the church. We opened only last July and the supportive people who come back time and time again, are really the fuel of inspiration.

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**HOME AWAY FROM HOME** - Meanwhile off to another part of the world tomorrow (Friday) - **Peru** to be exact - is a very special group of 17 local residents who will be leaving their homes here to build a new one there in the community of **Pucallpa**. Not for themselves, I hasten to add. But rather, according to organizers, **Robert & Brigitte McKinnon**, for a family in great need of shelter while providing a certain dignity. This is the fourth such trip in as many years for the McKinnon clan of Mom, Dad, and their five sons. But what makes it really special, says Robert, is that it is the first where they will be accompanying volunteers from the Hudson community. All of whom will also take part in the inauguration of the next Pure Art fresh-water well and visit the Pure Art school children enrolled this year in Pucallpa.

Excitedly looking forward to their journey of discovery are **Nicola Shafiepour, Leslie Blake-Coté, Nicole Durand, Hank Pardoel, Suzie Coté, Linda & Alan Wongkee Sonia Primerano, Roxanne Rainville, and Sean Goharzadeh**. Bon voyage guys and gals. Enjoy, work hard, keep me posted by e-mail, and look forward to talking to you on your return. (See full story on page 3).



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