

# Good Will

By Paula Kozbial

There's no one quite like Hilda Rossi. Her enthusiasm, energy and vitality are evident within seconds of meeting her. Though she has committed her life to helping those trying to survive tragedy, she has a true love of life that is seen in her easy laughter and effortless smile. Her spirit is contagious and maybe

Canadian Central American Relief Effort, where Oakville-based Rossi is now creator and director.

Together with her right-hand woman, Rosie DeBiasi from Mississauga, she made the long trek to the small village of Timushan, a humble community in the Merendon Mountains of eastern Guatemala that was hit hardest by the disaster.

They were shocked by the devastation. Roads and villages were wiped clean away, and people were dying of starvation and disease. And even though they saw misery beyond comprehension, they had hope and a vision: That one day, Timushan would be a bustling community and a "bridge" to all neighbouring villages.

"Though the disaster was over, the people were only starting to rebuild their lives. Without our help, they can't do it. They don't have hope. We are their hope," says Rossi.

During their short visit, the two friends were able to help build five cement block homes — homes that were an immeasurable improvement over the meagre one-room dirt-floor wooden huts with banana leaf roofs to which the people had grown accustomed.

When Rossi and DeBiasi returned to Canada, they formed a humanitarian organization and began canvassing for donations.

"Our mandate is to work on health, education, reconstruction and community development initiatives, leading toward a self-sustainable community," explains Rossi.

With no pamphlets or written material and armed only with a strong belief and strength of character, Rossi literally knocked on doors and stopped people in their tracks. The Crossroads Family of Ministries made a \$10,000 donation in that first year. Rossi's passion was cited as the minister's reason for believing in this one woman who wanted to make a difference.

Rossi laughs when she recalls moments when people have told her that they don't have time to



A mother, wife and part-time ward aide nurse at Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital, Rossi keeps herself so busy organizing CCARE that she barely sleeps.

that's why she has accomplished so much in the past six years.

Rossi's path in life took a major turn in 1998 after her family in La Union, Guatemala made a plea for help. There and in neighbouring villages throughout Guatemala and Central America, Hurricane Mitch had ripped through, destroying villages and killing about 9,000 people while leaving more than one million homeless. After the call from her family, Rossi sent a cheque to help relief efforts, but felt guilty about the small part she played. So she decided to see the damage for herself and how she could assist the most. That was the beginning of CCARE, The

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