

Mexican Odyssey

The BC work team kicks off new service program

'The world stands out on either side,
No wider than the heart is wide;
Above the world is stretched the sky, —
No higher than the soul is high...'

"Renaissance"

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Brevard College's first "Project Inside-Out" work team returned March 11 from Durango, Mexico, after a week of building on both construction projects and international relations.

Brevard sophomore Ann Whitmire echoed the sentiments of the entire crew when she said, "It was the most incredible experience of my life."

The 12 students accompanied by four faculty-staff adults spent the March 3-11 Spring Break repairing an old school gym, teaching English to Mexican children, and renovating the home of an 89-year-old woman.

They say they learned, among other things, that love is the international

language. According to Hendersonville freshman Penni Todd, "You don't have to be able to speak someone's language to show you love them."

They witnessed a land of contrasts: grinding poverty next to opulent homes, choking air pollution next to the most beautiful courtyard gardens in even the poorest of homes, and the open use and sale of cocaine on the streets in contrast to the sheltered lives of the elementary age schoolchildren they taught.

"You could never learn this from a textbook at college, could you?" said work supervisor Mike Dodson reflectively. Director of Public Information Jock Lauterer agreed. "It was total cultural immersion," he said. "Even those of us who couldn't speak the language came back spouting Spanish."

That was one of the purposes of Project Inside-Out—to give a real education "from inside the classroom to outside to the real world," said Project Coordinator Sybil Dodson.

The Mexico work trip was but the first of what BC administrators hope to be a broad-based community and international service program aimed at two things: enhancing the total education of Brevard College students and making a difference in this world.

The trip kicked off BC's new service component which will required of 1990's incoming freshmen class.

As the BC work team departed, they heard President Billy Greer tell them, "you're making history for BC. Someday you'll be able to look back and tell your grandchildren you were the start of all this."

Into Another World

After flying out of Asheville on March 3, the work crew arrived the next day by car in the 400-year-old, high mountain desert city of Durango (pop. 500,000).

From then on, the BC students found themselves immersed in a week of unforgettable experiences — beginning with the Sunday church service during which BC saxophonist Anthony West played "Ode to Joy" on the sax in the echoing, tall-ceilinged church. That was followed by Robin "Wick" Wicker delivering the sermon in English — translated line by line in turn by pastor J. Milton Velasco.

Wick told the parishioners, "I know at the end of the week it'll be hard to leave — but we all had the thirst to come."

There at Durango's little Methodist church, the visiting American students sang "Amazing Grace," only to have the congregation respond by singing the well-known hymn back loudly in Spanish. Afterwards, someone observed that it reminded them of the musical exchange from Spielberg's "Close Encounters of the Third Kind."

The afternoon was spent visiting and singing with the church youth, and taking a walking tour of the city. Monday morning the work team met two challenges in



"Eye! Eye! Boca Raton, Fla., in Durango, Mexico. (BC photos)

the same place: they were welcome to Colegio MacDonnell by the scores of schoolchildren they would be working with — and this, coming at an assembly in the same gym they would be renovating.

Even the school's American director, Kenneth Darg, called it "that horrible, primitive auditorium." The thick plaster walls had faded to the color of fallow dirt. The makeshift fabric ceiling had been ripped away totally. Thus, the BC work team found themselves in a large, dark, bonechilling cave where most of the light came from sunshafts piercing through several high tiny windows offering little hope of light or warmth.

The transforming began with music, spirit and then sheer grit.

First, it started with the children. Fanning out all over the courtyard-style school (a transformed monastery), the BC students taught English, sang songs and played games with the Mexican school children who so thoroughly adopted their American visitors that they besieged them for autographs.

But the old gym had a harder heart to warm.

Someone suggested that "Dirty Dancing" veteran Penni Todd warm up the group with aerobic dancing accompanied by American rock and roll (a rarity there) on the tape deck. Then, the group pitched in and for three, long muscle-weary days slapped, daubed and rolled multiple coats of paint on the old walls and built part of a lattice-style ceiling.

It was bone-numbing, grubby work in a depressing cave of a gym. But the BC students were more than up to the challenge. Said Baker, La., freshman Danny Miller brightly, "I came to get dirty."

Down and Dirty

It got down and dirty midweek when the school's American director announced that the gym would have to be entirely repainted because he didn't like the color the team had used — until it was pointed out that it was he who had ordered the paint color. After he publicly apologized to the



The BC students adopted "Little Grannie," Senora Lucita. Here, Hendersonville freshman Penni Todd combs the 89-year old woman's hair.