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Pembridge Insurance and Friends Support Bridges to Community Canada

Markham, ON – For the past two years, Pembridge Insurance has actively supported the efforts of Bridges to Community Canada (BTCC), a charitable organization who works to improve the quality of life for residents in Nicaragua.

Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America and the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. The need for improved housing and drinkable water is critical. In partnership with BTCC, Pembridge staff and fellow broker partners have formed a ‘Pembridge and Friends’ group, and have recently made two trips to the Jinotega region to build homes for families in desperate need of habitable accommodations. “The situation in the region is unacceptable,” says Bob Tisdale, President and COO of Pembridge Insurance. “Resident homes are made of scrap wood and plastic sheeting, held together with rope. The floor is mud and fraught with unsanitary bacteria. It gives me such pride that a week’s worth of hard work really changes the lives of these families.”

During the most recent trip, the ‘Pembridge and Friends’ group constructed two sturdy, cinderblock homes that are hurricane and earthquake resistant. The home’s recipients worked right alongside them. “It was amazing to see these local small men lifting huge cinder blocks and bags of concrete up hills and down long roads, hardly breaking a sweat,” recalls Bob. “Not only that, they would never take a break even when we did.” The construction cost of a home is roughly \$7,000, funded largely through donations, but it’s not completely free for the recipients. The homeowner’s must pay a \$1,000 loan back over a period of 10 years.

When the rest of the group was asked why they joined Bob in Nicaragua, they all agreed it was an opportunity of a lifetime. “A humanitarian trip is something I’ve always wanted to do, but I was waiting for the right opportunity,” said Mark Leger, President of Vienneau Assurances in New Brunswick. “The chance to help and to network with colleagues from across the country provided the perfect opportunity I couldn’t pass up.” As Mark points out, the experience was not only the chance to make a substantial difference in the lives of the families; the trip offered an opportunity to bond with other insurance professionals. “I loved the thought of a group of people in our industry coming together to make a change,” recalls Rose Ann Shaw, Office Manager at Bryson Insurance in Ontario. “Travelling with such a dynamic group of volunteers made the work not feel like work,” remembers Bob. “I forged relationships with my colleagues and the participating brokers in a new way. We shared living accommodations, shared every meal together, and worked together through challenging labour, language barriers and weather conditions. There were so many laughs, stories told and created, and powerful bonds made that will never be broken.”

At the end of the day, the most rewarding aspect of the experience was seeing the result of the finished homes and the overwhelming gratitude of the recipients. Roy Cluett, President of Cluett Insurance in Nova Scotia, fondly recalls “A little girl from one of the families stood up and thanked us for our help. She was very happy to be going into a nice, clean, dry, new house. That speech made my day knowing I was helping at least one family in need.”

While the trips conducted by the ‘Pembridge and Friends’ groups have made a significant difference in the lives of a few families, the situation remains dire in these Nicaraguan

communities. “This is why Bridges to Community’s work is so important and impactful,” asserts Bob. “We can’t eradicate poverty in Nicaragua, but we can certainly make a difference. The outcome of our work is very real, and the appreciation of the community and homeowners makes all the hard work worth it, tenfold. We truly are making a concrete difference, one house at a time.”

Pembridge has pledged to maintain their support of BTCC, and is committing to an annual ‘Pembridge and Friends’ trip where participants will continue the meaningful work that BTCC is doing. “Leaders like Bob Tisdale are critical to the impact for BTCC, as they can provide education to the groups attending,” states Tracy Makris, President of Bryson Insurance. “Education for us all to understand the core of the issues is, in my opinion, the start of change.”

Mark Leger agrees. “I’m a big believer in the ‘teach a man to fish approach’. So, I think the education component is key,” he says. “I also think it’s great that the locals participate in the building process so that they gain that experience and pride, and maybe use what they learn to improve their lives and their community.”

About Pembridge Insurance

Founded in 1999, Pembridge has established a strong Canadian presence, operating in Ontario, Alberta, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Our exclusive focus on personal lines insurance products means we are strategic, nimble and often first-to-market with new products and services. Through our network of leading insurance brokerages, Pembridge provides innovative connections to personalized options to meet the needs of consumers. Backed by one of the largest insurance companies in North America, with total assets exceeding \$105 Billion, customers and brokers benefit from financial stability, thought leadership and the promise that as the industry evolves, so too will the products and services offered by Pembridge Insurance. www.pembridge.com

About Bridges to Community Canada

Bridges to Community Canada (BTCC) is an organization that is focused on improving the lives of Nicaraguans in a sustainable and long-lasting way, with a special focus on the farming communities in the department of Jinotega in the north of Nicaragua. These communities were deeply impacted by years of warfare throughout the 1970s and 1980s, leaving nearly 60% of the region’s population living in extreme poverty. Within this region, BTCC works closely with community leaders to help mitigate poverty in four distinct but overlapping program areas: housing, water and sanitation, education, and economic development. <http://bridgestocommunitycanada.ca/>

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