

Families on a mission

Southington man, 83, may have made his last trip

Record-Journal reporter Dan Champagne recently spent nine days in La Romana, Dominican Republic, with missionaries from this area. Here is another installment of his Dominican Journal.



Stories and photos by
Dan Champagne
Record-Journal

JOHN GALAYDA isn't sure how many more times he will be physically able to make the mission to La Romana. He has announced every year for the last several years it would be his last one.

"I really think this is my last trip," said Galayda, 83, a Southington resident, during his latest trip. "I don't want to be testing the Lord out to see how much he's going to help me." Although he entertained the thought of not making the trip this year, he opted to go in part to spend some quality time with two of his grandchildren.

Cara and Matthew Gooding, both of Bristol, have heard the stories about their grandfather's trips for years. They wanted to experience it for themselves and decided to sign up for the weeklong mission this year. Their grandfather followed.

"I've heard his stories since his first year and I really wanted to experience this with him," said Cara Gooding, a nursing student at St. Joseph College in West Hartford. "Every year he's been saying it may be his last year, so I wanted to make sure to be able to do this while he's still able."

"With all the photographs he's brought home, I've actually seen a lot of this stuff and a lot of the people who have come with him," said Matthew Gooding, a Web designer. "We're a close family anyway, but you have a different relationship when you're here. It's a different experience." Galayda, a retired industrial engineer at Pratt & Whit-



Bristol resident Matthew Gooding, left, works with his grandfather, John Galayda, 83, of Southington, at The Good Samaritan Hospital in La Romana.

ney, has been assigned special projects over the last few years to ensure his health and safety. While many of the group members sweated in the sun and swung pick axes, Galayda was on the second floor of The Good Samaritan Hospital applying Formica to panels and desktops and sanding down wooden partitions for the bath rooms.

"To me, I'm rejuvenated every time I come here," said Galayda, who has 10 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. "You see so much and it really makes you thankful for what you have when you go home." "It's nice to be able to work with my grandfather because that's something I don't get to do a lot," said Matthew Gooding. "I think because me and my sister decided to go, he definitely wanted to go again." Galayda started coming on the trips when he was 68 years old. He has put in so much time and effort, the hospital dedicated a room in its pediatric center in his honor.

"It's great to get to see the work he's done," said Cara Gooding. "I was able to see it through pictures, but it's not the same. It just wouldn't be

the same without him here.” “It’s wonderful to see my grandkids take an interest in something like this,” Galayda said. “It’s really nice to get to be down here with them and spend some time working with them. I’m like an old car. I need to get pushed to get started. The young people on this trip are the pushers.” Along with Galayda and his two grandchildren, the trip also served as a bonding experience for parents and children as well as siblings.

Robyn Spinaci of Wallingford took the trip with her son Chad, a 2006 Sheehan High School graduate, and 17-year old daughter Crystal, a Sheehan senior.

She had come with her children separately, but decided to come with both this year because it may be Chad Spinaci’s last. He will head to the Academy of Art University in San Francisco in the fall.

“I definitely wanted to go this year because it will probably be Chad’s last,” Spinaci said. “I definitely wasn’t going to miss that. For them to be able to talk about the trip and each give their own perspective is really touching.”

“To come here and experience this together is pretty special,” Chad Spinaci said. “I get to see something different in my family than from home. My mom is such a motherly figure at home, but here she’s really a leader. My sister is into make up and clothes at home, but here she’s in the dirt with a pickaxe. That’s pretty cool to see.” The brother and sister duo worked side by side at Batey 50 during the week, helping to construct a fence around a church.

“I think it makes it easier to have family here,” Crystal Spinaci said. “This is a week that we all get along because we’re trying to accomplish something together. Working with my brother is interesting because we get to see a side of each other that we don’t see too much of at home.”

“I think we get close just being here together and seeing what we can accomplish together,” her mother said. “For them to give up their time that they could be with their friends over the summer to do this really makes me proud.”



Pillar, a resident of Batey 205, greets members of the Dominican Republic Mission Team.



Chad Spinaci and his sister Crystal Spinaci, of Wallingford, work on the foundation for a fence at Batey 50 as part of the Dominican Republic Mission Team.