



Compassionate Resource Warehouse:

In volunteer hands, excess goods become
welcome supplies around the world

BY MARIANNE SCOTT

PHOTOS BY GARY MCKINSTRY

IN 1999, Dell Marie Wergeland went to Honduras to help victims of Hurricane Mitch-induced landslides that killed thousands and left millions injured and homeless. The registered nurse brought along medical supplies, tools, and school materials. She worked in refugee camps and clinics distributing goods donated by aid groups.

“It was chaotic,” said Wergeland, 56. “We’d find unmatched shoes, parkas appropriate for Winnipeg, junk. But what really disturbed me were those statements from the local doctors: ‘if I only had... we could do...’ They were reusing needles and gauze. It went against everything I’d been taught.”

Returning to Victoria, she was determined to do something. Sponsored by the Church of the Nazarene and with the support of husband Vic and that of brother-in-law and Saanich Councillor Leif Wergeland, she decided to send a shipping container full of goods suited to local needs. A container holds the equivalent of a fully stuffed single-car garage with a three-metre ceiling. “I didn’t have a clue what it would take,” she said.

It took 18 months to ship that first load. In the decade since — and 300 containers later — Wergeland has put to good use her Royal Jubilee Hospital nursing training and the geriatric nursing care she specialized in later. “Providing good long-term nursing care takes organization and a lot of multi-tasking,” she said. The result? A non-profit organization called the Compassionate Resource Warehouse, with a 465-square-metre repository in Esquimalt, a satellite loading centre in Colwood and a shipping location in Vancouver through which tons of donated goods pass. Destinations include Kenya, the Philippines, Moldavia, India, and Nicaragua, with Haiti and Pakistan receiving special attention last year.

Wergeland stresses that CRW’s containers fulfil longer-term rather than emergency needs. “We didn’t immediately go to Haiti to help,” she said. “We’re second responders, sending goods when they can be delivered. And we must be asked for assistance. So we’re not supplying charities in New Zealand’s Christchurch or the victims of Japan’s earthquake



Dell Marie Wergeland puts in 60 volunteer hours per week running the Compassionate Resource Warehouse, which she founded.

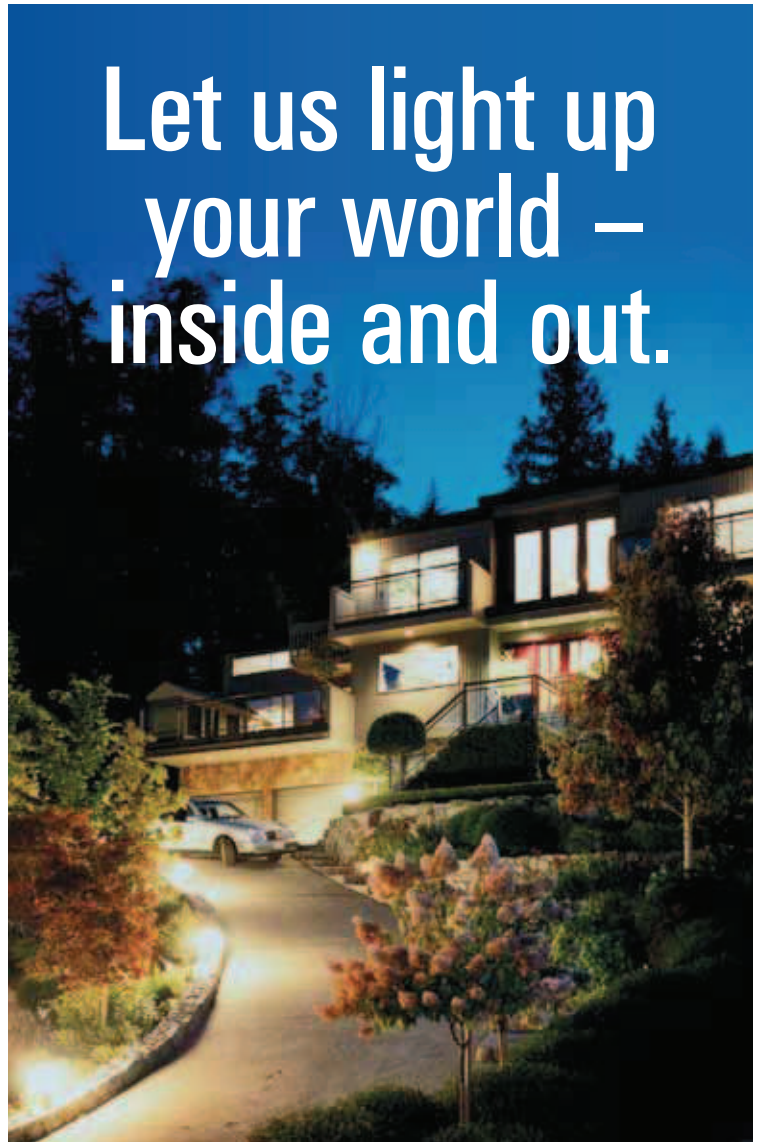
and tsunamis. These are developed nations and they've not asked us for help."

With her two daughters grown, she puts in a 60-hour work week as a volunteer. Time differences have her getting up at odd hours to make telephone calls. But she's not alone. Leif Wergeland continues to raise funds to help pay for shipping costs and to provide contacts. About 70 volunteers contribute to the work each week. They sort, pack and repair at the three sites; some pick up boxes or used soap from hotels; one mends walkers at home; others tear old sheets into bandages; more show up to load the containers.

"I love it," said Wergeland of her work. "As a church member it's part of my heritage to give to those less fortunate. We're so blessed — and so blasé about it. I was just in Haiti and saw the joy that even very small items give. It's so emotional for me to get the thanks and hugs that our team earned."

A walk with Wergeland through the Esquimalt warehouse shows the tasks she has mastered. When she started, her learning curve was formidable: finding donations of goods and cash, recruiting volunteers, locating responsible agencies to use and distribute goods, dealing with shipping companies, preparing export manifests, and satisfying ever-changing customs regulations. "I learned by working through it. There's no book on it."

Let us light up your world – inside and out.



Whether it's interior or exterior lighting, no one gives you more selection, more professional expertise and more personalized advice. Visit our showroom today and discover the art of great lighting — it's where you'll find lighting solutions as individual as you are.



VICTORIA: 2885 QUESNEL STREET • TELEPHONE: 250-384-9359
NANAIMO: 201-4300 WELLINGTON ROAD • TELEPHONE: 250-756-3614

www.illuminationsbc.com

A Boarding Kennel that loves your pets as much as you do.



- Comfortable, clean & healthy fresh air environment
- Quality, nutritious foods • Exercise yards up to one quarter acre
- Feline "Cuddle Time" • K-9 Playschool course
- All managerial staff "Certified Kennel Technicians"
- Recommended by veterinarians • Full grooming services available



PUPPY LOVE Pet Care Centre **THE CAT'S MEOW** 

2918 Lamont Road, Saanichton 250-652-2301

puppylove.ca email: info@puppylove.ca

Just minutes from Victoria Airport & BC Ferries Terminal

Layers of stacked boxes line the facility's six-metre-high walls. The boxes are generic (liquor boxes, for example, can't travel to certain countries) and are variously labelled: "girls' summer," "men's winter," "eye glasses." Soon, many of these boxes, along with bikes, wheelchairs, linen, medical equipment, toys, tools, school books, and a host of other supplies, will be shipped overseas to an orphanage, school, home for the disabled or hospital — recipients must be a registered charity so they can receive goods tax-free.

As much as possible, Wergeland fulfills a "needs list" supplied by the charities. This ensures they receive what's most vital and prevents donated goods from becoming black-market fodder. "We follow up," said Wergeland. "We visit. We know that these charities have a history of delivering aid. And many have a Canadian connection,

The CRW has grown into an octopus with many tentacles. Goods arrive from individuals, church groups, consignment shops, libraries, hospitals, cruise ships, hotels, and many businesses. William Head prisoners clean up bikes from police stations for delivery.

One local organization supplying the CRW is Canada Comforts, headed by Sylvia Hatfield. Her 100-plus contacts across Canada sew children's clothes, make quilts, knit thousands of teddy bears, and crochet baby togs. "Boxes with 100 dresses, each with a pair of panties in a pocket, just arrived from two groups in Ontario," said Hatfield. "There's a lot of love in this country." Volunteers span Canada, all contributing both materials and labour. One Victoria group — ranging in age from 40 to 91 — congregates Tuesdays to sew, roll bandages, and make bags that hold teddy bears and other toys. Wergeland insists on good quality. "We represent Canada," she said. "I want to be proud of what we send."

It seems to be working. David Heppner, director of Global Neighbors Canada, distributed blankets, shoes, clothes, and hygiene products to Burmese migrants in Thai refugee camps. "They were especially happy with their blankets," Heppner wrote from Thailand. "The cold season is here and they'll be warm inside their bamboo huts."

"Dell and her team are a blessing to humanity across the globe," emailed Marj Ratel of the Korle-Bu Neuroscience Foundation in Ghana. "The container arrived this January and it has transformed the school and the community. A library has begun, textbooks are in full use and teachers have supplies to teach the children. Dell never refuses a request to help — she always manages to find a way to meet the needs."

The Esquimalt facility shows the extent of our society's surplus goods. One section is reserved for wheelchairs and crutches. Medical office equipment occupies another corner. Blankets and towels are checked for cleanliness; volunteers take linens home to wash and repair. In a smaller room with photos of happy children festooning the walls, a group of women sorts donated clothing. Is it clean? Do the zippers work? They reject T-shirts printed with profane, drug, or

Victoria's Largest Selection...

Quality Closet Organizing Systems

- * Custom storage solutions by Trained Professional Organizer
- * Custom wood closets and storage
- * Hundreds of Melamine and wood finishes
- * European adjustable closets
- * Kitchen rollout shelf conversions



Call Janet to book your in-home consultation

250.590.6328

AllOrganizedStorage.ca

Custom made cherry wood storage unit with fudge stain

alcohol messages. The clothes are packed into boxes or small plastic bags, called “stuffies,” which will fill every centimetre between the containers’ equipment and boxes.

Volunteers come in Wednesdays and Fridays. Retired teacher Dorothy Godwin specializes in school supplies; husband Ken sorts and repairs sports equipment. Yolande Marshall has taught herself to repair wheelchairs. A special team dismantles and fixes old equipment from doctors’ offices. Donna Owens neatly boxes surplus eye glasses. Réjean Bussièrès resembles a mountain goat as he scales stacks of boxes and tosses them down for loading. Wergeland moves among them like a symphony conductor.

Why do all these people do this work?

“It’s the sense you’re making a difference,” said Yolande Marshall. “And it allows me to use my skills in very fundamental ways.”

“Yes,” agreed Dorothy Godwin. “These things we send give people a leg up. We don’t change the world or governments. But we give hope.” **VB**

For more information go to crwarehouse.ca. Goods can be dropped off on the last Saturday of every month at Lumberworld on Quadra Street, from 8 am to 5 pm.



Wergeland sends off medical supplies and equipment, toys, books, and even a first aid mannequin.

*Our glass work.
Your masterpiece.*

Thermal King Glass
We see it through

You supply the vision. We'll take care of the details. Expert advice, installation, and a large selection of solariums, skylights, and windows.

250-478-1286 | thermalkingglass.com | Victoria, BC

Patience is our virtue
choose only the best to teach you.

Wallace DRIVING SCHOOL.com 250.38.DRIVE