

Nonprofit group aims to help impoverished children in Peru

By Kelsey Stuart

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Mi Casa de Angeles is back and ready for the nonprofit limelight.

"It took us five months but we are finally a valid 501(c)(3) nonprofit," said Gabriella Brignardello, 16, founder of Mi Casa de Angeles, which aims to help impoverished children in Peru. "Since then we have been able to expand our fundraising options beyond the normal garage sale and carwash."

Recently the nonprofit partnered with the Rotary Club of Westlake Village in a raffle that raised \$1,000.

The next fundraiser will be a movie night on Saturday in the Kennedy Wilson auditorium at 1 Baxter Way in Westlake Village.

"We will offer two movies, 'Ice Age' from 4-6 p.m. and 'Night at the Museum' from 6:30-9 p.m.," Gabriella said, adding that \$3,000 in sponsor funding will go toward popcorn, drinks and raffle prizes.

The grand prize is an iPad. Other prizes range from iPod Nanos to gift certificates at local restaurants. Gabriella is also offering a gift certificate for a pair of her custom-made 1STEP shoes.

Gabriella's 1STEPS start out as white tennis shoes. She then spray-paints them with a custom design. The shoes sell for \$25, with 100 percent of the proceeds going to Mi Casa de Angeles.

"I will have a booth set up for 1STEP that will have samples of the shoes that people can purchase or I will be taking purchase orders," Gabriella said.

Gabriella, a junior at La Reina High School, founded the charity in 2009 after one of her family's annual trips to Lima, Peru, to visit her father's family.

"I wanted to help the children by giving them opportunities that they didn't have," she said. "I saw that they had poor forms of public education, so I decided that a school would be the best way to give them better lives."

Gabriella created Mi Casa de Angeles, which translated from Spanish means “My House of Angels.”

She said the angels are meant to describe the guardian angel concept because “we are there to watch over the children.” Her initial goal is to build a school in an impoverished area of Peru for 120 to 150 schoolchildren by early 2013.

“To date we have raised \$8,000 and we plan to have \$35,000 to \$40,000 raised by the end of the year,” Gabriella said.

She needs roughly \$500,000 to \$700,000 to complete the school. Gabriella said she will build when they have enough money for one grade. That will require \$100,000.

The nonprofit is growing. Her youth board began with five members, all La Reina High School students. Now it has 12 members from high schools all across Ventura County.

Because of Gabriella’s age, her father is listed as president of the nonprofit. Carlo Brignardello said Gabriella never ceases to amaze him.

“We have watched her really pick up the fundraising this summer. She knows this is the best time to do it because of how much time is required for school during the semester,” Carlo Brignardello said.

Mi Casa de Angeles hopes to bring in \$3,000 from the movie event. Tickets, which will be available at the door, cost \$8 for one movie and \$14 for both, with free admission for children under 3.

To preorder tickets, call Mi Casa de Angeles at 358-0002. For more information on the nonprofit, visit <http://www.micasadeangeles.org>.



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