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Uruguayans benefit from Loudoun's faithful



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Loudoun volunteers brought clothing for field workers. **Courtesy Photo/Sandra Hidalgo-Cravens**

It may be 5,000 miles from Loudoun County, but for Sandra Hidalgo-Cravens the country of Uruguay is never far from her mind, both emotionally and spiritually.

Her grandparents were Salvation Army officers and her grandfather, Mario Jourdan, was from Uruguay. Along with his wife Loida, Jourdan built a vacation home in Uruguay with the hope that one day the property would be used for ministry work. But in Mario's lifetime that never happened.

“They built a vacation home to offer a place for rest, for enjoying nature and for

reflection and connection with our creator. Their desire was for this location to be used for the Glory of God and kingdom work,” Hidalgo-Cravens said.

But through his granddaughter, Mario's vision has become a reality.

For the last three years Hidalgo-Cravens has been leading a delegation from Loudoun County to the Rio de la Plata in Colonia-Valdense in Uruguay to host a retreat for missionary women and their children that live in the country. The mission, known as Serve the Servants, offers the mothers a time to relax, reflect and recharge for the year ahead.

“It's different than let's say what some would think is a traditional missions trip ... rather than giving something to the community and then leaving to go back to the U.S., we pour into those that walk in relationship with them on a day-to-day basis. They have more of an impact on the field, on the ground with them than we do being there for a week,” Hidalgo-Cravens said.

Most of the missionary women hail from either the U.S, Canada or Europe, so the retreat is in English. It is non-denominational and ecumenical.

“It is also an opportunity for these women to meet other women in the field doing mission work throughout the country, as I am sure at times it can feel that you are alone in this calling,” Hidalgo-Cravens said.

Women attending took part in prayer and counseling sessions, worship and craft making along with being offered massages.

The group of helpers has doubled in size this year. “We also take men with us from the U.S. down to Uruguay as well so that they can do construction work on the property for expansion,” Hidalgo-Cravens said.

A number of those making up the delegation are from Christian Fellowship Church based in Ashburn, like mother of four Emily Long.

“I have had a desire to be involved in missions overseas since I was a sophomore in college,” Long said. “I'm coming into a season where those opportunities are becoming more viable. So, when I heard my friend's vision for this trip I jumped on it. I love the concept of serving the servants. We took a lot of fun supplies the women can't get easily in South America like a ridiculous amount of peanut butter. We had sriracha sauce, syrup, clothes that had been denoted and some maternity and baby items ... they were so excited about the peanut butter especially.”

Both Hidalgo-Cravens and Long believe working as missionaries in the field can be lonely, so the retreat was also designed to help women meet others who are doing missionary work throughout the country and have had the same calling.

Some attendees are now in their third year, like Tammy who shared her testimony, "This retreat saved my life," she said.

"I have been going to the retreat since its inception, and I couldn't have known that two days after my first retreat that I'd be sick with a brain bleed that would test me in so many ways. Each year God uses the ladies on the team and activities to give me what I need for that year," Tammy said.

Hidalgo-Cravens said her grandfather was committed to making his property in Uruguay feel like a home. He planted every tree on site.

"I know he is looking down from Heaven seeing his dream realized – that it is being used for ministry and the seeds he is planted are reaping a harvest," she said.

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