

# Rotary Club of Edson Fire Truck Donation to Mazatlan, Mexico 2005



*Somehow I ended up volunteering to document this extraordinary opportunity to assist others in the spirit of Rotary. In the words of another Wayne "I'm not worthy"!*

The trip schedule:

Saturday, Feb 19 Lethbridge  
Sunday, Feb 20 Idaho Falls  
Monday, Feb 21 Mesquite  
Tuesday, Feb 22 Las Vegas  
Wednesday, Feb 23 Las Vegas  
Thursday, Feb 24 Nogales (held up)  
Friday, Feb 25 Navajoa (skipped)  
Saturday, Feb 26 Mazatlan  
Sunday, Feb 27 Mazatlan  
Monday, Feb 28 Mazatlan  
Tuesday, March 1 Mazatlan  
Wednesday, March 2 Mazatlan  
Thursday, March 3 Mazatlan  
Friday, March 4 Edmonton – Edson



My family sees us off

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02/19/05

Saturday, Feb 19 Edson to Lethbridge: Wow, after months of preparation and anticipation the trip begins. Large snowflakes were falling as we left Edson 7:45am Saturday. Terry McDonough followed us from Edson buying gas every chance he had. (We filled up four times to Calgary.)



We met up with the Grande Prairie Rotarians & their Fireman (Harvey Pearson) at the Husky Truck Stop on Acheson Road, had breakfast then began the convoy. We stopped a few times in Edmonton for sponsor pictures. Weather got colder with blowing & drifting snow around Calgary. Calgaryans followed us down on channel 770 (I think), waving to us as they passed. The media



and the fire department as well as many well wishers met us at a PetroCan station on Macleod Trail where we filled with gas - the manager/owner donated \$100 towards our fuel bills. My travelling



partner Vic is documenting donations, we'll thank all properly when we return.

Engine 65, the pumper truck we are driving, has a 60 litre gas tank, so we stopped regularly .... Acheson Road... Red Deer... Calgary... Claresholm... Lethbridge.

We stayed at the South Country Inn while in Lethbridge. Nice rooms, hot tub, continental breakfast, in room coffee service, fridge. I felt that we were all anxious to get across the border. Walked to a nearby steakhouse for supper. Had soak in hot tub. We were all in our rooms immediately after supper (and a soak in the Hot Tub). Vic was asleep and snoring within 30 seconds of lying down. I worked on our web site



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after a quick lesson from our Engineer friend Rotarian Wayne Shultz from Grand Prairie. Even though we have high speed wireless Internet here I stumbled around trying to send pictures and text to the proper places on the site. (I'm remembering finally going to bed around 3:00).



02/20/05  
 DAY 2 (Feb 20): Lethbridge was cold as we awoke, one of our crew had to get some spray starter for one of the Diesel Fire trucks. At the Coutts border crossing we had a three-hour wait to process the paperwork, then we were on our way. Montana offered a short bit



of blizzard conditions, but when it cleared up the landscape was wonderful. We stayed in Dillon Montana overnight.



02/21 We left Dillon Montana: Temp:+1, going up over the mountains, we are around the 5000' level Heading for Idaho falls. Snow dissipating, sun ahead.

The last few days we have been quite tired by 11:00pm. Editing the site has been tough in the evening. Now I'm composing while on the road! Have you ever tried to drink from a glass while riding a horse at a gallop?



The drivers: Harm Gerrits, Rick Conrad, Allan Kuechle (GP-SC), Wayne Murray (Edson), Wayne Shultz (GP), Vic Maris (Edson), Harvey Pearson (GP FireFighter), Harry Sandhu (GP)

The Pumper truck we are driving, engine 65, is performing perfectly, only one litre of oil



added so far. Fuel every 80 miles, we've taken to refuelling just off the roadside with jerry cans so that we don't have to pull off the interstate as much.



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The sky cleared up as we left Montana. We took the bypass around Salt Lake City Utah, it was a good route, we didn't have to slow below 100k at all. We lunched at the Flying J in a small village just north of the Great Salt Lake Utah. Then decided to press on to Mesquite Nevada some 7-8 hours away, a long drive but conditions seem pretty good. I went on the net with my wireless aircard on my laptop and got the forecast for Las Vegas where we will spend two days - 12 degrees and rain (Edson's forecast is about the same without the rain!). We arrived in Mesquite around 9:30 PM. We had supper in the casino dining area. Some of us gambled. I worked on the website. States passed through = 5: Montana, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, and Nevada.



02/22/05:

We left Mesquite Nevada around 10:00am and made Las Vegas in one and a half hours (86 miles). We then stopped to wash the vehicles and check the fluid levels etc. After the wash we drove the strip where I snapped pictures as fast as I could. Then it was off to the hotel to prepare for our partaking in the local Rotarian clubs' centennial celebrations. We will be parking the shiny vehicles out front of the hotel the night of the Centennial gala.



We are waved at, whistled at, and given thumbs up by folks on the street very often. I was stopped by one couple from Kelowna who wished us the best and said seeing what we are doing made them feel very proud to be Canadian (sure warmed my heart). I want to let all you Rotarians and all of



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you folks who support our causes that your efforts are appreciated so much by those of us on the trip and by those folks who see us pass by on the way to Mexico. I'm honoured to be a Rotarian, and to be in the company of Rotarians - we really can make a difference in the world!



2/23/05 Day 5 (Wednesday, February 23) ---

Today was a day of rest at the Gold Coast Hotel where the Rotary Clubs of the Las Vegas area were celebrating the 100th anniversary of Rotary International with a dinner. We met many wonderful folks and were entertained by a dulcet High School choir dressed in international costumes. Our Alberta clubs' donations were given special mention many times. We toasted the American president and they toasted the queen. We were given a present of a Nevada rotary belt buckle and were happy to present our club banner to the Rotary club members at our separate tables. The Nevada Rotary clubs presented us with 10 new wheel chairs to bring with us down to Mazatlan (I suddenly got something in both my eyes). Vic told me he met some new Rotarian friends, he said if all Rotarians were as friendly the U.S. and Canada would be much closer world partners.

2/24/05 Day 6 (Thursday, February 24):

Trip today started at 6am and 13 hours later we are in Nogales, Arizona by the Mexican border. We are looking forward to meeting up with a couple of Mazatlan Rotarians who will assist us to cross the border tomorrow. The sign reads "ROAD CLOSED - FLOODED". After some deliberation we decided to go proceed, and found road crews patching potholes.... Rather glad we did not back track.



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2/25/05

Day 7 (Friday, Feb 25) Friday morning we waited in Nogales AZ for our Mexican Rotarian friends till noon. We expected that all the paper work would be completed and that we would pass with ease through the



Mazatlan Rotarian "Cacho" and his son expedite papers

border. We had heard that last year the Rotarian donation convoy of two school buses (they are still in use to transport students to an environmental school) had to wait at the boarder for over 9 hours. We were hopeful that our wait on the stateside would be our longest hold up. We were wrong. It was decided, through much discussion in Spanish and much translation by the 16yo son of our Mexican expeditor that we should transfer some of our cargo of turnout gear, boots and jackets to their pickup truck to be taken separately through the border. We passed through a gate then we had to be cleared

through another gate, but it was siesta time so we had to wait for 4 hours until everyone came back to work. Then we had to park at a loading dock to be inspected. We waited while the Mexican folks milled around with papers pointing and discussing and looking concerned. The turn



out gear and equipment caused some delay. The biggest potential problem was that the serial Numbers on our truck were transcribed wrong by someone within the Mexican authorities, an 0 turned into a d a 1 was added to the end. After much discussion and deliberation by many folks

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Photo by Allan Kuechle

Mazatlan Rotarian "Cacho" and his sons

we finally were cleared after sitting around for over nine hours. We finally passed the Mexican border at 1:00am by that time the serial numbers couldn't be read without a flashlight, which we didn't offer.

We spent hours parked at a loading dock with a view of more than a dozen school busses of various ages in a holding compound. We pictured our vehicles beside them as we waited. Some choice words were uttered!



2/26/05 Day 8 (Saturday, February 26)  
After much packing and unpacking of our equipment, and much paper shuffling by the authorities, we were finally allowed to cross into Mexico at 10:30pm. We all decided to carry on driving right through to Mazatlan.



The 3 fire trucks and 1 school bus have been running like tops. No breakdowns. Everything great. We drove all night and day arriving in Mazatlan this evening at 5:30 PM. A very long day, driving over very tough road conditions. The Mexican highways were quite a challenge - 4" shoulders and many trucks passing our mirrors with only centimetres to

spare. Road signs were all bent backwards by contact with traffic hitting them. Many of our crew (not me of course) experienced the adrenaline rush of falling the 8" or so off the pavement onto the desert floor while negotiating one of the many sharp bends on the road. From the time we left Nogales on Friday to 5:30 PM on Saturday when we arrived in Mazatlan we had been on the road for 19 hours and had only one meal in the city of Obregon.



2/27/05 Day 9 (Sunday February 27)

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As we drove our co-rider would try to get some rest, take pictures and look at the map. We travelled on toll roads through the two states in Mexico (Sonora & Sinola), it seemed like a new toll gate would come every half hour or so (tolls totalled around 1000 Pesos or \$100 US) . Members of the military with nasty looking machine guns guarded every gate. The soldiers and attendants were very friendly however. Whenever it seemed that we had attracted favourable attention I turned on the siren, I think

it was appreciated by all (no one shot at us anyway). People on the streets and in the back of pickup trucks waved at us, I heard one fellow say "god bless you" and wave as we passed, (I gave him a bit of siren).



We arrived in Mazatlan, and headed to our hotel, our truck was out of gas and out of reserve fuel so Vic and I pulled off to get gas while the lead vehicles seemed to have left us behind. Later we

found out that one of our Grand Prairie Rotarians was left on the street to flag us down and direct us to our hotel (we had no clue which hotel). We continued driving along the seawall wondering when we would see the lead trucks when we were directed to stop by a local. He showed Vic, his ID that indicated he was a local Fire Chief. I translated that he





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was going to show us to a safe compound in which to park the fire truck. We decided to follow him. We ended up meeting some of the local fire fighters who were visibly very happy and excited. Some Canadians from the Grand Prairie area (Falher) met us. They had been following the trip on the Internet and the papers since we left. The Mexican fire Department and our local Rotarian leaders were ready at 1:00 am to meet us in Mazatlan. They had received the news by phone from one of the towns many hours up the road that we had just passed through so they were able to go home and get some sleep. A contingent including the Canadians was waiting to meet us as we pulled into Mazatlan, but we came in through the other route.



It is now 4:47 P.M. and I am missing everything out on the beach. Pictures later. Breakfasts and Lunches booked to meet and greet. No digital Cell. No wireless internet. Updating folks at home will be difficult.

2/28/05 Day 10 (Monday February 28)

This morning (8:30) we had breakfast with Mexican Rotarians and Arturo Garcias the director of the voluntary fire department, and Eliezer Guajardo the director of the aquarium.



The fire department consists of 70 Volunteer members and 10 paid drivers. The fire department has a 20-minute response time (it took over an hour to find water to test the trucks pumpers) and has been using engines as old a 1952. Infrastructure improvements are not paid for. It seems the department runs on a water tax of 1 peso/month in property taxes only. The nearest backup fire department is 120 miles away. The school bus will be used to transport students from the



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outlying communities to the Aquarium where they are taught conservation of the coastal environment and fed a nice lunch. While we visited the Aquarium we saw the previous donated bus still hard at work transporting appreciative students all the signs indicating Grand Prairie Rotary club were clearly evident on the bus. In the Evening Vic and I were treated to a supper



in the old town at a well-known & very nice restaurant Pedro y Lola by Jorge Arturo, Suzanne, and their son Andreas as a thank you for sponsoring their daughter Paulina as an exchange student. We were reminded to say hello to George & Jaye Mah who went the extra distance to make Paulina & her family welcome.

03/01/05 Day 11 (Tues March 1) **Breakfast at hotel. 9:30** *Paseo por la Ciudad: (Atencion: Patronato de Bomberos y Club Rotario Mazatlan, A. C.) Kokeen (Rotario Mazatlan) & Cambido (fireman) toured us around the city.* Showed some rotary projects (Park, childrens playground, Seawall), Emerald Bay Hotel. 1:00 *Comida - Lugar Restaurant "El Marismeno" (Patorcinio: Club Rotario Mazatlan Norte) lunch at Shrimp house with many Rotarians.*

Meeting with the Mayor: Kokeen (Alejandro Gonzalez Lie past Rotary Director of Youth exchange), Allan, Alejandro Higuera Osuna (Mayor), Pepesan (Rotarian Translator)



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**3:00PM.** Harvey, Vic, Rick, Pepe-san, Oscar (pepe san's son translated) trained firemen.

Allan Kuechle and Wayne Shultz will meet with 3 newspapers.

Supper at La Casa Country, a Calgary / Mexican mix complete with line dancing waiters.

**03/02/05 Day 12 Wednesday. Met with Mayor 8-9:30,** (Reunion Con El Lic. Alejandro Higuera Osuna

– Presidente Municipal de Mazatlan.) **Breakfast in old**

**downtown.** (Desayuno Lugar: Cafe Pacifico. Atencion: Club

Rotario Mazatlan, A.C.) **Toured renovated theatre & the old**

**town centre.** 11:00 aquarium tour, **Turtle release** (49 baby turtles

must be released within hours of hatching). Bird show, sea lion

show, turnover of bus keys (pictures & presentations) buffet. **9:30**

**P.M.: Rotary club meeting downtown** at the El-Cid Hotel being

hosted by the Downtown club with representatives of the 3 local

clubs. Mazatlan Rotary clubs are hosting 12 exchange students

presently, we met with girls from Brazil, US, Germany, Belgium.

**03/03/05 Day 13, Thursday Mar 3** We had breakfast in the hotel, and were told by Pepe that the entire Hotel tab was to be paid by their clubs. These people were so thoughtful. A parade through the streets of the city to the firehouse was planned with the police leading the way and blocking the streets for the large trucks to manoeuvre, Paulina's pumper could turn on a dime and had no trouble negotiating the tight turns and narrow alleys. We went off parade style with the lights running and the



sirens going and the horns blasting. We got every look imaginable, but mostly waves and wonder, smiles. We stopped for fuel for one of the trucks, it was low on fuel.

1:00pm Ceremony of the donation of three Camiones Bomberos la Patronato de Bomberos de Mazatlan.



We pulled into the fire fighters garage and were surprised to see a crowd of about 150 guests and 40 firemen.

We recognised many faces in the crowd, one special guest was Paulina Gavilan's mom Suzanne. Suzanne was very happy that the pumper will always be know as Paulina's Pumper, marking a special year with the Rotary youth exchange program.



Schedule: Fire Fighters formal presentation of the Fire Trucks. We were thanked by all, Allan was asked to say a few words, he told the story in a nut shell and left the door open for a



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future project. All official spokesmen thanked us. Plaques were presented to all drivers and shirts, hats, and pins were given



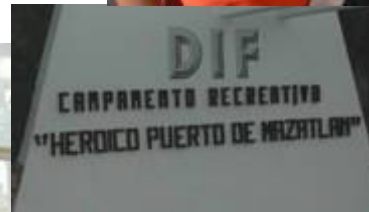
and traded.



Lunch was hosted by Estacion de Bomberos Ave. Insurgentes it was a very traditional lunch in the Aquarium park. Tacos with fillings like guacamole, peppers, fish, and beans. Very nice. At 3:30 we toured the Social services



Jose & Oscar



(DIF) Recreation camp for under privileged

children where the kids learn to work together to conserve the coastal environment.



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03/04/05 Day 14 Friday March 4

6:30 Vic and I walked on the beach then swam in the ocean and soaked in the hot tub before showering, dressing and packing somewhat. Breakfast around 8:30 in the hotel restaurant. 10:00-12:30 Transferred pictures between cameras and computers. Finished some last minute purchases then finished packing. Headed for the Airport. Pepe accompanied us until we went through customs. Suzanne Gavilan met us at the Airport to see us off. We are to say hi to George and Jaye, and all the folks back home from the Gavilan family. Paulina says hi from France.

