

## University of Wisconsin-La Crosse students serve others during interim session

University of Wisconsin–La Crosse students wishing to make a difference in the world spent their January interim session volunteering in Bunche, Ecuador.

A group of 20 UW-L students traveled to Bunche, a coastal rainforest village of 500 residents. Primarily a farming and shrimping village, the students helped improve basic essentials for the remote community, which is an eight-hour bus ride from the country's capital of Quito.

The service program, “Building Bridges in Bunche,” and was founded by UW-L student Erik Kahl and Associate Professor Darlene Lake, who conducted research in the village this past summer.

“The students worked long days painting the village’s elementary school and the day-care center, constructing park benches, and building garbage cans out of bamboo,” Kahl said. “When the students were not hard at work, they were learning about the local culture, education system, and government.”

To prepare for the trip, the students conducted supply drives and raised funds to purchase more supplies to bring with them and leave an even greater mark. In addition to school supply packages for each of six elementary classrooms and the village’s day-care center, the students created 65 packages that each contained a pair of shoes, clothes, hygienic supplies, and a toy. These were distributed to the neediest of families in Bunche.

“Ecuador taught me my true calling in life,” said UW-L sophomore Adam Bradley of Almond. “It helped me gain a greater appreciation for the things I take for granted and showed me what truly matters most.”

The experience was life changing for some students because they saw another part of the world,” said Kahl, who also serves as Student Association president at UW-L.

“The students worked so hard, and you know you have made an impact when the people of Bunche are begging you not to leave and the UW-L students are in tears because they have to say goodbye,” Kahl said.

If you are interested in learning more about *Building Bridges in Bunche*, the students who attended this year’s trip will be showcasing photos, foods, and experiences at “An Evening in Ecuador” on March 23<sup>rd</sup> from 3-5pm in Cartwright Center’s Port O’Call. Those interested in contributing school supplies, used clothes or shoes or other materials for the next *Building Bridges in Bunche* group, contact Darlene Lake ([lake.darl@uwlax.edu](mailto:lake.darl@uwlax.edu)).

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