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## Clean water is goal for group headed to islands



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By Nina Garin, Union-Tribune Staff Writer

San Diego — You wouldn't think Fiji, a country that exports its own bottled water, has a problem with contaminated drinking sources.

But a big part of the South Pacific island's population can't afford the pristine water depicted on those fancy square bottles.

Instead, the people drink from the same polluted rivers and wells where they wash their clothes and bathe. Drinking that kind of dirty water leads to digestive disease and even death.

Darrel Larson, a pastor at Canyon View Christian Fellowship, wants to change that. Last night, Larson boarded a plane with 22 volunteers to install water filters in Fijian homes.

"There are about 800,000 people in Fiji, that's about 200,000 homes," he said. "I want to put a filter in every single house. I think it's a goal that's very tangible."

And after Fiji, Samoa is next on the list for clean water, he said.

Since August, Larson and Give Clean Water President Amanda Mineer have gone to Fiji four times. This time, the Fiji Water company is footing part of the bill.

"They bottle water out of a natural spring," Mineer said. "But not everyone has access to it. They're interested in reaching out to the community, too."

So far Give Clean Water has installed a little more than 1,000 filters.

The small device filters 99.9 percent of contaminants when attached to 5-gallon buckets, which Give Clean Water also provides. The filters have a lifetime guarantee, but volunteers show families things like how to clean and flush the filter.

The non-profit organisation also staffs full-time volunteers in Fiji that check on the families, offer technical support and conduct research.

Volunteer Sumner Tison is a chemical engineer who specialises in purifying water for vaccinations. Tison is on his second mission, but this time he's bringing his 13-year-old son, Noah.

"I think it's a great opportunity to expose my son to the needs in other countries," he said. "I like that it's something good we can do together."

This is Noah

Tison's first trip out of the country and, along with going scuba diving, he is looking forward to getting out there and working.

"I'm excited to see the look on people's faces when they get the clean water," he said.

Give Clean Water schedules three humanitarian missions to Fiji a year. A volunteer pays \$2,500, a fee that includes airfare, hotel and meals.

"Some people pay out-of-pocket," Mineer said. "But we want people to think of it like a breast cancer or MS walk, you know, where you get people to sponsor you."

Daniel Nemanich, a Qualcomm software engineer, got his co-workers to sponsor him for one of his three Fiji expeditions.

"People really want to help out when they see what we're doing," Nemanich said. "We're not just putting a Band-Aid on the problem, we're giving the people a solution."

Hours before boarding a bus to Los Angeles International Airport, Nemanich was taping boxes and organizing luggage. Rancho Santa Fe's Patricia Hayward handed him a heavy bag full of hard candy and toys to pass out to Fiji children.

Hayward thinks about details like that from her time working in the Peace Corps in Kenya. She heard about the Fiji trip through a man who was cleaning carpets in her home.

"From my experience in Kenya, I know how important the clean-water issue is," Hayward said. "I really like what this group is doing. I'm not associated with this church and I like that they make it open for anyone to join them."

Larson chose Fiji because he already had contacts there. And he felt changing a small island isn't as overwhelming a task as trying to fix a place like Africa.

"At the end of your life, you can look back and say you helped change this entire country," he said. "That's what gets me fired up."

And once the people of Fiji are set up with drinking water, Larson has his sights set on Samoa and Tongo.

"I grew up in Oceanside and so many of my friends were from those islands," he said. "My heart is in those places. We can change the world one filter at a time, one country at a time."

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