



# behindthehammer

STORIES AND IDEAS ABOUT PEOPLE CONNECTING THROUGH MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE

## Safety first

Youth from Foothills Mennonite Church rest in Kelowna, BC during a hard day's work of fence repair. Despite the treacherous terrain and the dangers of barbed wire, the volunteers worked together, wore the proper protective gear and escaped the week without injury.

Photo credit:  
Byron Thiessen



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## Even volunteers have to play by the rules

If you board an airplane and pay attention during the safety instructions, you'll learn an important lesson about helping others: in the event of an emergency, secure your own oxygen mask before helping your neighbor!

This common rule is one that translates well into multiple situations where safety is a concern. Disaster responders need to pay particular attention to the rules of safety. If we are injured (or out of air), we are not only unable to assist others, but we require care that may have been intended for another person.

It is critical for volunteers to stop, think, and follow the precautions that are necessary to protect ourselves and those we serve.

This issue of *Behind the Hammer* includes a few reminders of the risks that volunteers face and the steps that lead to safety on the job site.

Fortunately, the majority of safety precautions are based on common sense and good judgement. As an organization, MDS is working

hard to develop guidelines that remind us of good judgement and cover the bases of volunteer safety. While safety instruction is covered in detail during volunteer orientation on the project site, some of the MDS safety guidelines are also reviewed in this newsletter.

Safety precautions are not always as obvious as first-aid kits and protective clothing. Proper maintenance of tools and vehicles is a huge factor in volunteer safety. A healthy diet and a solid night's rest are also important ways to remain alert and keep our judgement sharp.

As a community of faith, we begin and end each day in prayer. We may not be guiding the flight, but we are responsible to review the safety procedures and put on the oxygen masks when needed. As you read this issue, look past the regulations and into the stories where safety is influenced by our concern for each other, our positive attitudes and our common desire to serve God as we meet the needs of others.



## Coordinator's Corner

by Kevin King  
Executive Coordinator

### The thermometer and the thermostat

*Thanks to C.L.Graber who used this illustration at an all-unit meeting in 1963.*

There are two instruments that most homes have in North America. One is a thermometer and the other is a thermostat. The former, usually filled with mercury or alcohol, reflects the temperature around it. It demonstrates openly what the situation is. It tells us in no uncertain terms accurately, honestly, and fearlessly. But that is ALL it does.

The thermostat is a bit more complicated: it is an automatic control device actuated by temperature and designed to be responsive to change. It is like a thermometer but with one additional very essential factor built into it, the element of control. One merely reflects what is going on around it, the other has the capacity to interact with the environment.

In the creation account, after all plant and animal life had been created, God creates man and woman, creatures with the breath of life and living souls. God breathed into us an element of control. We are thermostats, not merely thermometers. Humans have imagination, they can dream dreams. Humans can envision, plan and act. We are not to be "conformed to the world." We are to transform it.

We have our limitations - we can change the world and make it better or we can make it worse. Therefore, it is important that we allow God to set the thermostat properly.

When there is a disaster we could simply report it and remark how awful it is. But as Christians, our thermostats are set to respond. When disasters strike, MDS sends investigators in with local folks and reports back the needs. What happens? Dozens of men and women volunteer for duty to transform the situation. When our thermostats are set properly and our sensors are working, we can clean up unfortunate situations and make a difference in the world.

What are the things that are keeping us from getting a proper reading? What is preventing us from reaching out and transforming our environment? I thank God for the MDS thermostat - may we continue to be responsive to the needs around us. May we continue to allow God to set the temperature of our response.

## Join the volunteer movement



by Lois Nickel  
Administrative Coordinator

As you read this issue of BTH you might think, "It's getting more complicated and difficult to respond to disaster - what keeps MDS volunteers going?" Even as new laws and policies make MDS more complicated, there are simple ways for you

to keep the volunteer movement going strong.

**Be an example.** Teens, young adults, and middle-aged people are unlikely to volunteer until they see service modeled by those who they respect. It's likely that you have volunteered in some way this week. Have you taught a class, served on a committee, coached a team or worked with MCC? Show your peers, your friends, and the youth in your life that service is a healthy and rewarding part of your life. Your enthusiasm will encourage a lifestyle of service that may lead to more interest in MDS opportunities!

**Share your story.** If you've been a volunteer with MDS or even another Christian organization, keep on telling your friends, your church, and your relatives about the positive experience it was for you. While participating in the Leadership Training workshop in Kelowna two months ago, I heard project stories and experiences that were moving, humorous, and memorable. They made me want to hop on a plane and experience project life for myself. You can motivate others too.

**Think big.** Your unique situation should not stop you from considering a term of service. At times, MDS is able to accommodate individuals with families, disabilities, health problems and financial restrictions. Both MDS staff and project leaders attempt to find meaningful work for people who are at different points in their lives. Cleaning, washing dishes, and driving to and from the lumber store are significant ways to involve a variety of skills.

**Take the plunge.** While our staff is committed to keeping the projects open, we need your help as volunteers to lead the projects and work on the crews. We are working at the red tape of disaster relief so that volunteer opportunities exist for you, your children, their children and all who wish to serve in the name of Christ.

## Why the Ens family of three chose 2004 to serve in Jackson



### Interview by Lois Nickel

Wendy and Darcy Ens, Fort Garry Mennonite Brethren (Winnipeg), recently returned from a two-month assignment at the MDS tornado-response project in Jackson, Tenn. They took their 1 year-old daughter Brianna along for the ride.

On sabbatical from Manitoba Hydro, Darcy funded the missions trip with savings and plans to return to work as a lineman in Sept. With prior experience as a program planner at an Age and Opportunities senior centre in Winnipeg, Wendy is now looking forward to full-time work as a mother.

### When did you first hear of MDS?

W: Both of us have attended Mennonite churches all our lives and have always been aware of what MDS is.

D: My parents went short-term in 2001. Various friends have also been on projects.

### What about MDS inspired you to volunteer?

D: Three and one half years ago I started planning to save towards a 6-month sabbatical. As the time drew closer, I wanted to spend part of the time on a missions trip. I love construction, so MDS was a natural fit.

W: We both wanted a place to serve with hands on and practical involvement.

### How did your faith affect your decision to serve?

D: We feel so blessed and fortunate in our lives and wanted to give back by serving others during time off. MDS was a place where we could work and live our faith by example.

### What sacrifices did you make in order to volunteer?

W: To take care of a child in a strange setting. The biggest

sacrifice was on the part of my parents. Brianna is the only grandchild; being away for two months was hard on them.

### What was your biggest surprise while serving with MDS?

W: NO HOMESICKNESS! It felt so right to be there and I didn't miss family or friends like I was sure I would.

### Who was your most interesting client?

W: There was a couple with a child Brianna's age who escaped their trailer during the storm. Darcy worked 4 weeks on their new home and they got quite close.

D: We went to church with Alina one Sunday. She is a long-time Christian but her husband John is not. Part of my job as an MDS volunteer was to share my faith with John.

### How was the MDS experience for Brianna?

D: We were so concerned about how the other volunteers would react to a baby being part of the team and everyone adopted her and was wonderful. Brianna started out quiet and shy and by the end was just as loud as everyone else over the supper hour!

### How did your church support you before, during and after your term of service?

D: Our small group encouraged us before we went.

W: I sent an "Ens Family Adventures" newsletter each week to family and friends. After a week or two the church asked for it and started putting it on the bulletin board.

D: Now the church wants us to report and encourage others to help with a local Habitat project they are sponsoring.



A 1 year-old MDS volunteer Brianna Ens (right) joins hands with Jackson friends at the dedication of a home that was rebuilt by MDS following the May tornadoes of 2003.

### Is there anything else you'd like to share about MDS with the readers of *Behind the Hammer*?

D: Being in a place where you are not in control of much and letting God be in control was so neat.

W: We went to serve and came home feeling more blessed than we thought possible.



**Photo Credits:** (Clockwise from upper left) Deanna Willms, Deanna Willms, Rachel Braul



## Youth head to hills

by Shami Willms

Nine senior high youth and six adults from Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary, got up early on their first day of Easter break and headed to Kelowna, BC. Their mission was to work with MDS to fix 2.5 kms of fence destroyed by last summer's forest fires.

It was amazing to see the devastation and loss experienced by the people of Kelowna. Almost, everything was black and charred. Walking amongst the ashes we saw little signs of life and knew that God was powerful and able to restore devastation and make all things new.

Early Monday morning, the group began a beautiful day in the hills tearing down the old fence and starting to pound new posts in the charred hills. The terrain was steeper than anyone expected.

The youth worked extremely hard and followed their fearless MDS leaders, Jerry and Doreen Klassen. Lunch was a great time to come together for fabulous home cooked meals prepared by Brian and Linda (the host family we were helping).

God was very evident through the trip, bringing the right people to the right job and allowing us to get the work done without injury. We were also extremely blessed with great discussion and prayer times in the evening as we looked at scriptures relating to Holy week and the impact of the whole Christ event on our lives. The youth have already been asking what we will do next year, since our MDS experience was such a positive one.

## May your courage encourage others

by Carla Hunt, Assistant Coordinator

*Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Deuteronomy 4:9*

At a recent Bible conference I heard, "Fear cannot be your excuse for not serving God. Joshua, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the disciples and countless others were all told, 'Do not be afraid.'"

What fears have we overcome in our own service? How can we prepare others so that they are not apprehensive about serving? What can we say to help them be careful so that they will have a good experience when they volunteer? The Deuteronomy verse gives some clues – remember what you learned about yourself and share your experience with others.

## Safety guidelines

All volunteers working at MDS projects are required to bring and use the following safety equipment:

1. Hard-soled shoes, preferably steel-toed (no sneakers)
2. Coveralls or full-length pants (no shorts)
3. Eye protection

At times, MDS may provide and request that volunteers use the following additional safety equipment:

1. Hard hats
2. Ear protection
3. Gloves
4. Dust masks/respiratory equipment
5. Chaps (for chain saw use)
6. Safety belts and life-lines (for roofing work)

In addition to the above guidelines regarding protective wear, every MDS vehicle, tool trailer, kitchen and office must be stocked with a first-aid kit that is stored in a visible and accessible location.

Any injury requiring the use of first-aid materials must be logged in the safety ledger. The binational office in Akron should be notified within 24 hours when professional medical attention is required by an MDS volunteer.

## Vehicle usage policy

Due to restrictions in MDS insurance coverage, the following regulations are in effect for all drivers who operate MDS vehicles:

1. A valid driver's license must be photocopied and placed on file at the MDS project office PRIOR to operation of any MDS vehicles. Duplicates of these records for long-term volunteers must be sent to the binational office in Akron.
2. Individuals under the age of 25 are NOT permitted to operate MDS vehicles under any circumstances.
3. Individuals over the age of 70 must file a state or provincial driver's record AND a clean bill of health with the MDS binational office in Akron, Pennsylvania PRIOR to operation of any MDS vehicles. The bill of health must be signed by a physician and state that the driver does not have any medical conditions standing in the way of vehicle operation.
4. Seat belts must be worn at all times by drivers and passengers.

Volunteers who are unwilling to comply with this policy will be kindly asked to leave the project. Thanks to all of our volunteers for working within these parameters as you respond to those in need.



MDS safety guidelines and vehicle usage regulations are under constant review and revision to assure that we are offering our volunteers the maximum protection available. For more information on MDS volunteer safety, please visit the MDS safety page online at: <http://www.mds.mennonite.net/Volunteer/Safety>

## Meet John Walker



### The new MDS communications coordinator

John Walker began working for MDS on May 24, 2004. In this interview, Ted Houser invites Walker to share about himself and why the position of communications coordinator inspired him to join the MDS team. *Editor's Note:*

*Houser, who held the communications coordinator position until Walker's hire, remains with MDS in the new position of project logistics coordinator.*

### Tell us about your family:

My wife, Bonnie, and I have been married 20 years and have two lovely teenaged daughters: Charity (17) and Stephanie (14). Bonnie teaches 2nd grade at Bethel Christian Academy in Carlisle. Charity is talented in art and photography and is interested in Japanese animation. Stephanie loves to draw and plays the piano, flute and piccolo. As a family, we love to go to the ocean and visit our home country of Canada.

### How is your home a reflection of who you are?

We live in a small ranch house in New Cumberland, near Harrisburg, PA. Bonnie has created a warm, comfortable place in which we love to entertain. The decor is a cross between Victorian and country. Outside our personalities sneak through in our gardens. We live in a town setting because, while we're not quite country folk, we're not quite city either.

### What do you do to stay involved at church?

Bonnie and I have served as pastoral couple to three Brethren In Christ (BIC) churches in a total of 20 years. In January, when my term as pastor of West Shore BIC church concluded, we began attending Mechanicsburg BIC church. Bonnie is hoping to serve in the music ministry, singing and playing flute and I would like to help with a video ministry.

### When did you first hear of MDS?

I first heard of MDS when my father-in-law, Randy White, went on a short-term trip to rebuild a native village destroyed by a river ice flow in Northern Canada. Each of the congregations I served with has had an MDS representative. Members of our church in Michigan joined work teams to help after the terrible destruction of Hurricane Andrew.

### What inspired you to apply for this position?

I have sensed God leading me into writing and communica-



### New 4x4 trucks added to MDS fleet

Thanks to a gracious deal from Moser Motors in Berne, Indiana, MDS has added two 2004 Ford pickups to our fleet of disaster-response vehicles. Both trucks are currently in service in Julian, California where they replaced old and unsafe equipment.

tions work for several years. Last year I served part-time with BIC Communications and got a real taste for the work. I also have a genuine love of people and want to hear their stories and testimonies. It is a dream come true for all these things to come together in one position where I can help to tell the story of the great ministry of MDS.

### What unique skills and vision do you bring to MDS?

In the 90s I was introduced to the sport of skydiving where I applied my hobby of video photography. During my years of jumping, I was privileged to watch some of the industry's best aerial cameramen. All this experience has taught me so much about telling a story with a camera. I intend to use this knowledge to produce videos and other materials that will promote the MDS vision of helping those in need.

### How does your personal faith affect your work?

Since my salvation, I am grateful for how the Lord serves us and calls us to do likewise. I think this is best demonstrated in Jesus' example to the disciples in washing their feet. I want to bring that cup of cold water to those in need and believe that the ministry of MDS will help me do that in practical ways.

*John began his communications career in the 70s as a radio broadcaster. In 1985 he graduated from Emmanuel Bible College in Kitchener Ontario with a Bachelor of Theology degree. In addition to 20 years of pastoral duty, he has worked in a group home for emotionally disturbed children and in a boys correctional facility. He edited the Emmanuel Bible College Alumni newsletter for several years and also performed proof and editing work for his wife's type design business.*



## Phoenix Chemical-Free Home

Donald and Susan Maxwell were severely poisoned in 1993. No, their Kool-Aid was not laced with arsenic, they were not victims to a carbon monoxide leak, nor were they sickened by a bad loaf of fruitcake.

The Maxwell's are survivors of over-exposure to a deadly chemical known as microencapsulated diazinon. They were poisoned at home by an improperly applied pest-control product.

The pesticide not only rid their home of creepy crawlies, it killed their ferrets, nearly killed their dog and left both of them with permanent brain, nerve, muscle, organ, chromosome and immune system damage. Exposure to common household chemicals now causes headaches, fatigue, muscle burning and pain, changes in heart rate and blood pressure, brain fog, loss of

consciousness, and days of sickness.

Although the Maxwells are permanently sick and disabled, they are finding some relief from the Arizona climate and the volunteers of MDS.

Menno Coblentz, MDS Arizona Unit Chair, is managing a volunteer response that will improve the day-to-day life of the Maxwell's. The Arizona MDS unit is building a home that will slow the progression of illness by eliminating the use of building materials that contain harmful chemicals. When combined with a medical sauna, air purifiers, oxygen, and a diet of organic foods and vitamins, the new home will provide a safer habitat and refuge for the Maxwells.

Call Menno at (602) 992-0546 for information on how you can support this response as a volunteer or donor.



Photo Credit: Archie Mulvena

Menno Coblentz, left, works with Arizona Unit volunteers to pour footers at the home of Donald and Susan Maxwell who were poisoned by a pesticide product in 1993. The new home is designed to protect the Maxwells from further exposure to chemicals.

## Get involved

### connect locally with MDS

**Region I Meeting: Oct. 9 2004**

Bernard Martin, (540) 434-1916

**Region II Meeting: Feb. 2005**

Willis and Phyllis Troyer, (330) 669-3925

**Region III Meeting : Nov. 19-20 2004**

Vernon Miller, (316) 662-1584

**Region IV Meeting: Oct. 21-23 2004**

Wilmer Leichthy, (541) 928-8294

**Region V: Oct. 17-19 2004**

Gord Friesen, (204) 257-9048

## behindthehammer

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**Behind the hammer** is published quarterly by the binational office of Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS). MDS is a non-profit agency that responds to the needs of disaster survivors. MDS volunteers cleanup, repair and rebuild damaged homes.

**Behind the hammer** is an opportunity for MDS volunteers, donors and clients to share about their common experience. Our stories encourage others to continue expressing the love of God through MDS.

**We welcome your stories and ideas** for print in this publication or for use online. Submit your ideas to Ted Houser, Editor, binational office.

**Enjoy a free subscription.** Contact the binational office to subscribe to this publication or notify MDS of an address change.

**News updates from MDS projects** are available by fax and E-mail or by calling 1-800-241-8111. You can visit us online at [www.mds.mennonite.net](http://www.mds.mennonite.net) for current photos and volunteer project information.



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STORIES AND IDEAS ABOUT PEOPLE CONNECTING THROUGH MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE

## **High council get acquainted with new kitchen trailer**

During an April visit to the MDS project in Julian, California, MDS Executive Coordinator Kevin King (left), Field Consultant Jim Shelly (center) and Project Logistics Coordinator Ted Houser (right) tried out the new Region IV Kitchen Trailer.

Dubbed the "high council" by project volunteers, the three-man team got a dose of project reality when their names appeared on the weekly dish-washing schedule.

