

Aurora students to spend March Break building in Ghana



By Brock Weir

As students keep one eye on the clock counting down to the beginning of March Break, some Aurora students got out a little bit early this week.

Mandy Coleman, Eric Cumiskey, Isaac Hambrock, Andrew Jaszuba and Kevin Speiring, all Aurora residents, are flying to Ghana this week as part of a 19 person team of fellow Pickering College students, due to help build a school on the western coast of Ghana.

As The Auroran went to press this week, the students were due to leave Wednesday for their 17-day philanthropic adventure planned in conjunction with the Me to We Foundation, an offshoot of Free the Children.

After arriving in Accra, they are set to settle in to the Ahanta West District where they will have hands-on experiences hauling rock and brick, laying foundations, and even building a garden to provide a place for their fellow students to live and play.

“There will be different aspects of building, depending on which stage they are at in the construction,” said Isaac on Monday as the students made preparations for their trip, packed, and embarked on Day 1 of their anti-malaria treatment. “It could be building the foundations and anything from brick laying, construction and even gardening around the site. There are different aspects we are going to be working on throughout our 17-day trip.”

With 20 places available on the trip, students had to apply and prove themselves to win a spot on the team. Once they had secured a place on “Team Ghana”, there was lengthy preparation to ensure they were ready to take on the challenge.

For Eric, this preparation included not only his travel shots and anti-malaria pills, but also sourcing out tough, durable clothes that would withstand the hard work to come. They were also immersed by facilitators from Me to We in the cultural norms of Ghana, everything from being conscious of a more conservative way of dress to camera etiquette.

“I am really looking forward to getting to know the village people there, working, and helping them out by building the school,” said Eric. “I feel like I am most anticipating a change in my day-to-day life, seeing how people live, how they have to do a water walk and carry all those massive jugs. I think I am going to be more conservative in my showering and my day-to-day use of food and resources they value so much over there but take for granted here.”

Added Mandy: “This is all about being open to a different culture versus ours back here in Canada. I have heard so much about these trips from people who have gone in the past and it is life-changing for so many of them and that is something I want.”

This will be the third trip Pickering College students have taken with the Foundation, but after two trips to Kenya, this will be their first in Ghana. Teacher Tom Lewis, who will be travelling with the students, said the group anticipates breaking ground on a new school building while finishing off one already in the works. But while school building is their ultimate objective, they will also have the chance to learn more about the Ghanaian history and culture including a forest canopy walk and even a trip to landmarks left over from the slave trade. At the end of the day, however, it is all about leaving their mark.

?This is something you might never have the chance to do again in your life,? says Isaac. ?It is going to be an experience I think we will all be able to build off of and hopefully learn things about ourselves. It is one thing to donate money to charities, and many people do that, but it is another to know you did something hands-on that is going to be able to help people who you might meet and get to know. We know it is going to help the community and will be really valuable.?