

Soul and salsa sparks hurricane relief for Puerto Rico



By Brock Weir

Puerto Rico was, until a series of devastating hurricanes, seen as an island paradise for so many looking for a warm getaway. But it was much more than that for Aurora native Ted Haberer.

Mr. Haberer called the island home for over 12 years and now, back in Aurora, he is pulling out all the stops to send some sunshine back down to Puerto Rico as they still grapple to get back on their feet.

Next Saturday, December 16, the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion will be transformed for the Puerto Rico Hurricane Relief Benefit Dance presented by Mr. Haberer and the band Soul Benefit.

Featuring salsa lessons from 7.30 ? 8.15 p.m., before the band takes the stage at 8.30, a limited number of tickets are on sale now from the Legion bar or through Mr. Haberer directly at thaberer@primedata.ca.

Proceeds from the benefit will go towards the new mattresses and toys for families impacted by the hurricanes.

While still at school here in Aurora, Mr. Haberer spent his time painting communications towers as a summer job. After going to study at York University, the company began building towers in Puerto Rico and they invited him down for a summer. There, he fell in love with the island, fell in love, and ended up ?sticking around? for over a decade.

?I made a lot of friends there and obviously still have very strong ties to the island,? says Mr. Haberer. ?I go down once or twice a year to reconnect with the people. When I lived there, I would be broken down on the side of the road with my piece of crap Jeep and I was never there long before someone just pulled over and got me back on the road. People really take care of one another there so, when it happened, Steve suggested I do something.?

That Steve is Steve Falk, owner of Aurora-based Prime Data where Mr. Haberer now works who, in his spare time, is one of the lead members of Soul Benefit, a band, formerly known as the Thursday Night Jam Band, which has become a mainstay of local benefits, providing their talents free of charge for good causes.

Putting their heads together, so too did the benefit.

While the benefit might be a couple of months removed from the hurricanes themselves, the devastation is still being acutely felt on the island with more than 70 per cent of Puerto Rico still without light and a good portion still without running water.

?I talk to people regularly down there and I am continuing to get reports of the aftermath,? says Mr. Haberer. ?There are people living in their homes with no roof, in a tent with no doors and no windows. FEMA is supposed to be giving people money for their houses but that is contingent on people having paperwork for that house, which they don't have. It is gone with the hurricane, or they built this house on their family property which has been in their family for generations and they don't have paperwork. If they don't have paperwork, they're not getting a dime out of FEMA. The outlook was grim initially, but the more I hear about it and the more reports I get, it is not looking any better as time goes on.

?People can get a table and chair and dry it off and use it, but once a mattress is flooded it's garbage and what you're seeing on the side of the road is stacks and stacks of mattresses and they are in front of houses with no roofs and no doors, and a family sleeping in a camping tent inside their living room or on a concrete pad that used to have their wooden home on it. Ideally we're going to try and give some of it to mattresses and a certain percentage to toys for kids that will be purchased down there.?

By coming out to the Legion next Saturday, Mr. Haberer says he hopes ticket holders not only get a chance to enjoy the music and learn a few new Salsa moves in the process, but also gain a full appreciation on how interconnected we all are in the global community.

?If something is happening far away we can still have an impact and make a difference,? he says. ?We're not as disconnected as we may think.?