

SchoolBOX is 'Making Education Possible' in Central America

Riding on the back of a motorbike up hillsides in rural Central America is just another day in the life of Jonathan Tam. He is seeking out opportunities for new school builds projects outside of Chichigalpa in northwestern Nicaragua.

The road is barely walkable, let alone driveable, yet he and his guide from the planning department in Chichigalpa reach the top. Once there, Tam sees two classrooms where children are sitting in darkness. The first classroom is a converted barn. The structure is made with rotten wood, and the floor is covered in mud. The rain starts to pour and seep through the holes in the tin roof. The children are starting to get soaked, but continue to learn. Jon speaks with the children and the teacher to assess their needs for the upcoming school year, before taking a harrowing ride back down to the main road.

Tam works for a small Canadian non-profit called SchoolBOX that was founded in Almonte in 2006. The organization builds hope for the children of Central America through the construction of classrooms and the distribution of school supplies to the poorest of the poor.

Jonathan Tam was born in Ottawa, attended St. Pius X High School and the Telfer School of Management at the University of Ottawa. He owes his drive and desire to work for those less fortunate to his experiences in his hometown.

After stints in Australia, the Netherlands and Belgium over the last six years, studying and working for various corporations, Tam made the move to Nicaragua in November 2010. Tam felt compelled to join SchoolBOX after speaking with its president,



Jonathan Tam, second from right in the photo below, moved to Nicaragua in 2010 to help SchoolBOX build classrooms and distribute educational packages.

Tom Affleck.

"Tom talked about meeting a young girl near Matagalpa in northern Nicaragua. He handed her a pencil and a notebook, and her father exclaimed that she could go to school," said Tam. "Tom conveyed to me that the barrier to education in Nicaragua was so low, and that several dollars could empower one to become educated. This one small act created the SchoolBOX movement that has built 26 classrooms and distributed tens of thousands of educational packages."

His various experience in project management and logistics management has helped him make an impact within SchoolBOX. On a day-to-day basis, Tam can be doing anything from seeking out opportunities to build schools in rural communities, to running a nationwide aware-

ness-raising campaign, to picking up a shovel and digging an out-house for a school.

"I love working for a small non-profit. I am being given the opportunity to learn and to gain experience in a different environment. I feel enriched and happy to make a difference in the lives of the communities where I work with on a day-to-day basis," said Tam.

SchoolBOX is a registered Canadian non-profit that is "Making Education Possible" for the children of Central America. For more information on SchoolBOX, please visit their website at www.schoolbox.ca or their Facebook site at www.facebook.com/schoolboxhelps. For every new 'like' on their Facebook page, they receive a donation of \$2.

To contact Jonathan Tam directly, please email: jon@schoolbox.ca.



Cultural Transformations: An invitation

Volunteers are an essential part of our culture – especially in Ottawa. They are often called "Friends of ..." whatever organization they are affiliated with and that is what they are. Last year The Wrap reported on a talk given in Ottawa by Simon Brault based on his book, *No Culture, No Future*. As the vice-chair of the Canada Council for the Arts and director general of the National Theatre School, he has a broad perspective on the state of the arts in this country.

At that talk last October in the newly renovated Museum of Nature, he stressed the fact that volunteers can bridge the gap between officialdom and the general public. "They are needed to fill gaps in knowledge, to bring people to a realization of the culture before them and how they can participate in it."

Fired by the success of last year's meeting, a panel discussion, "Cultural Transformations" has been planned for Oct. 19 to speak directly about how that can be done, what the needs of our growing diversified population are and what our public institutions need to do to assure new Canadians that they have a place in the country's culture.

Again it is volunteers who are behind this important exchange of ideas. It is presented by the Federation of Friends of Museums, the Volunteers' Circle of the National Gallery, the Friends of Library and Archives Canada, the Canadian Friends of the National Arts Centre Orchestra, the Ottawa Art Gallery and the Great Canadian Theatre Company. Co-partners are Aga Khan Foundation Canada and the Canadian Museums Association.

This is an open invitation to everyone. The event will begin at 7 p.m. in the delegation of the Ismaili Imam, 199 Sussex Drive. Admission is free and there will be a reception following the discussion. If you plan to attend, please RSVP to info@cffm.fcam.ca.

The Delegation of the Ismaili Imam serves as the headquarters of Aga Khan Foundation Canada and the temporary headquarters for the Global Centre for Pluralism. It also provides space to support the work of the Aga

Khan Development Network, a family of private, non-denominational development agencies.

Speakers for this event are:

Master of Ceremonies: Sylvie Morel, director, Canadian Federation of Friends of Museums,

Welcoming remarks: Khalil Z. Shariff, CEO, Aga Khan Foundation,

Moderator: David A. Walden, secretary-general, Canadian Commission for UNESCO,

Members:

Lee-Ann Martin, curator of Canadian Aboriginal Art, Canadian Museum of Civilization,

Charles C. Smith, lecturer on Cultural Pluralism in Canadian the Arts, University of Toronto, Scarborough,

Andrea Fatona, assistant professor, Critical and Curatorial Practice, Ontario College of Art and Design University,

Body Ngoy, director of Café Franco-Présence, an intercultural meeting and performance space.

Date: Wednesday, Oct. 19

Time: 7 p.m.

Place: The Delegation of the Ismaili Imam, 199 Sussex Drive (Street parking is available on Boteler Street, Dalhousie Street, Parent Avenue, Bolton Street. The Delegation has visitor entrances on Sussex Drive and Boteler Street.)

Admission: Free

If you wish to attend this exciting event, please RSVP at info@cffm.fcam.ca.



The Delegation of the Ismaili Imam, 199 Sussex Drive, will host the Oct. 19 Cultural Transformations panel discussion.

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