

"God put a rainbow in the sky as a promise of hope"

Rainbow Network marks 10 years

By Linda Leicht

LEICHT@NEWS-LEADER.COM

The west side of National Avenue between Cherry and Grand streets looked like a ribbon of color Saturday morning as more than 1,200 people dressed in red, green, yellow and blue T-shirts carried similarly colored balloons on what they called a "Partnership Walk."

The color and the walking were part of the Rainbow Network's 10th anniversary celebration.

"God put a rainbow in the sky as a promise of hope and protection," Rainbow Network founder Keith Jaspers told the walkers before they left First and Calvary Presbyterian Church.



Jaspers

"We're that rainbow on the ground ... the hands and feet that have to deliver that promise."

Jaspers, a Springfield businessman, served for several years on the board of the Habitat for Humanity International. He used many of the theories of that group — which provides housing for the poor through a self-help and volunteer effort — to establish Rainbow Network, a faith-based organization that works in rural Nicaragua.

The program grew beyond building homes to include nutrition programs, community schools and scholarships, a health-care system and an economic development program that provides micro-loans for businesses.

The crowd Saturday was made up mostly of network supporters, many of whom have been to



CHRISTINA DICKEN / NEWS-LEADER

Participants in the Rainbow Network's 10th anniversary Partnership Walk march down Cherry Street on Saturday morning. The faith-based organization helps poor people in Nicaragua.

Rainbow Network

To learn more about Rainbow Network and the work it does among the poor in rural Nicaragua, call 889-8088.

Or you may visit or write to 3834 South Ave., Springfield, MO 65807.

Only online:

To learn more about Rainbow Network and its activities online, click on this story at News-Leader.com.

Nicaragua, where they helped build houses, feed children, provide medical care, teach, dig wells and more. Others said they hoped to go someday.

Todd and Rebecca Holman walked around the perimeter of the Missouri State University campus with 16-month-old son Ezra in his stroller.

Todd Holman is a pastor in Bois D'Arc, where his congregation supports the Rainbow Network ministry. They have become avid supporters themselves.

"We plan to go to Nicaragua," Rebecca Holman said, as she held a sleepy Ezra.

WILLINGNESS TO HELP

Churches — about 100 of

them represented Saturday — were where most of the people at the event learned about Rainbow Network and the work it does in Nicaragua.

High school students Kayla White, Jenny Sare and Lauren Welsh came with their church, Ebenezer United Methodist.

They learned more about the program as they practiced their high school Spanish with two Rainbow Network staff members from Nicaragua.

Jader Mejia and Nelson Palacios sat on the grass and talked about the work they do among the poor in their country.

Palacios, a supervisor of three of Rainbow's six network offices, said it is important to share the stories of what is being done in Nicaragua.

"I want people to know it's important for the work to continue," he said through an interpreter.

Palacios, originally from Nagarote, spent 20 years as a high school teacher in Nicaragua.

He saw the work Rainbow Network was doing there, especially with schools and scholarships, and when a position opened in 2000 he decided he wanted to continue helping the young people of his hometown.

In Nicaragua, he is working on the local anniversary celebration, which includes a fund-

raising project within the communities where Rainbow Network has projects. The goal, he said, is to raise \$10,000, "enough to feed 10,000 children for 10 days."

The event Saturday was all about a willingness to help. Dozens of volunteers cooked hot dogs and sausages, entertained, led children's activities, organized demonstrations and handed out literature.

Along with a panel discussion about issues of faith and poverty, people spoke about the work of Rainbow Network and the issues of giving.

Missouri Supreme Court Justice Stephen Limbaugh of Cape Girardeau said he visited Nicaragua with Jaspers earlier this year.

Limbaugh pulled a picture of a young Nicaraguan girl out of his pocket, describing a beautiful child caught in the worst poverty he had ever seen.

"That is when I became committed to Rainbow Network," he said.

Former U.S. Sen. Jean Carnahan praised Rainbow Network. "You have shown the solidarity of God's people with the rural poor of Nicaragua, and you have raised awareness about the poor," she said.

"He who forgets the needy forgets God."