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O.C. volunteers help build computer network in Honduras

By FRED SWEGLES

The Orange County Register

Israel Lopez has a good grasp of building computer networks, but he doesn't usually do it while living at a school in a Third World country.

Lopez, a San Clemente native who lives in Capistrano Beach, is one of five volunteers back from a trip to Honduras representing an Orange County chapter of [Engineers Without Borders](#).

His experiences in [Juticalpa](#), [Olancho](#), [Honduras](#) were somewhat different from his biggest other foreign venture, in 2005, when he stayed with a family in Japan during a trip with his San Clemente High School Japanese-language class.

"It taught me that there's a lot more work to be done in a Third World country," Lopez said. "Life moves slowly down there, and the rest of the world is moving fast."

He and other volunteers raised funds to offset some of their travel costs to Honduras and paid their own air fares. Their mission was to upgrade a wireless network for Olancho Aid, a nonprofit education program that Lopez said includes a special-needs school, a bilingual primary school and a high school housed in seven buildings in a

three-mile radius.

The team included Lopez, Chris and Zarah Healy of Orange, Modesto Llanos of Yorba Linda and James McBryan from Tustin (who recently moved to Oakland).

They fine-tuned an existing network, assessed what they'll need to completely overhaul it and taught the locals how to better manage the network.

"We plan to go back in December," Lopez said. The goal is to install a new antenna system that will be fast, durable and reliable.

The group also has used technology to help out from a distance. Six months ago, the team set up a [VoIP](#) (Voice over Internet Protocol) [Linux](#) system, which allows parties to exchange voice data streams over the Internet. They sent it from Orange County to Honduras and remotely helped the locals configure it for their network, Lopez said. With remote guidance, the Hondurans were able to integrate the system seamlessly and save more than \$1,000 in cell-phone bills, as well as improve their internal communication.

On the trip, members of the group met with Honduran residents and learned about other community needs. The group also visited a university and gave a lecture to 16 students about open-source software and Linux.

Lopez, who has a Web-hosting business, said [Engineers Without Borders](#) hopes to foster a relationship in Juticalpa over the next five years.

"We're trying to build a model for schools in Honduras," he said, "so they can help themselves."

Contact the writer: fswegles@ocregister.com or

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