

Super hero: senior swimmer Bill Betz changes lives

By Jared Lloyd *NewsNet Staff Writer* - 23 Mar 2003

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An impact player in the world of sports is someone who enters a competition and makes an immediate difference.

But the impact of senior swimmer Bill Betz extends far beyond the confines of a locker room or a swimming pool. In fact, it even extends beyond the borders of the United States.

"It began with the desire to be in a situation where I could help," Betz said. "It's reward enough to help others, but it's even better to be able to see the results."

Betz's efforts began after returning from a mission and getting an opportunity to go to El Salvador with an organization called Help International.

"We did everything while we were down there," Betz remembered. "Sewing up wounds, delivering babies, giving kids vaccinations, just everything."

During that trip, he saw firsthand how meager the medical supplies were in that struggling nation.

"They had only one sheet to put on the hospital beds and they'd just flip it over once a day," he said. "They only had one suture kit and they'd use it ten times a day."

Although the conditions disheartened Betz, he didn't know what he could do to help. After helping a man suffering from hypothermia on a rafting trip, he found an opportunity.

"I visited the man [with hypothermia] in the hospital and he introduced me to Jose, who already took supplies to El Salvador," Betz said. "He had received donations from a Nephi hospital and told me if I could find a way to get them to El Salvador, I could have them."

With a friend, a broken-down old van, and optimism, Betz made the difficult trip back to El Salvador with the badly-needed supplies.

"The best experience was bringing things to the clinic where I worked the year before," Betz recalled. "They were so happy."

Even though his aid efforts are taking the spotlight at the moment, Betz deserves to be recognized for his accomplishments in the pool as well. He was named the National Swimmer of the Week on March 6th, becoming the first BYU swimmer to receive that honor.

"This has been my best year overall," Betz said. "Everything has been so much fun. The 20 guys I swim with are my best friends. Every time one of us raced, everyone was racing with them."

Swimming also gave Betz the motivation to make a difference.

"President Bateman gave a fireside for athletes and told us that we are special ambassadors for the Church," he said. "When you think of yourself as an ambassador, it gives you the motivation to be who you really want to be."

Although competing in swimming is very important to Betz, he said it couldn't even compare to the thrill of helping in El Salvador.

"Whenever you're part of a team that's working toward something good, it's the same feeling," he said. "The team remains from swimming, but the team and the feelings remain from helping others."

The journey opened up other opportunities for Betz, including a good employment option and the determination to return this summer.

"People read about the story in an article by Dick Harmon in the Deseret News and have volunteered supplies for the trip this summer," Betz said. "We still need white shirts and ties and Sunday attire, though. We want to take those items to the members in the area."

When asked about how it felt to become a catalyst for this humanitarian effort, Betz just shrugged it off.

"I don't feel like I do that much," he said. "Just about everyone is waiting for an opportunity to give; they just need a way to do it. People need to realize you don't need any great resources to be able to help out others."