

15 International Car Rally Teams Build With Habitat In Mongolia

HFH Mongolia Among Beneficiaries Of Participants' Fundraising Efforts

ULAANBAATAR, 4th October 2007: Habitat for Humanity Mongolia played host to 30 dusty travelers when the participants of a novel transcontinental car rally, the Peking Challenge 2007, passed through the Land of the Blue Sky. While in Mongolia, the 15 teams, each comprising a driver and a navigator, helped two Habitat home partner families to build their houses.

Mongolia was the penultimate leg of the 11,000-km. rally which started in Amsterdam, the Netherlands and took participants through Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Russia.

Organized by non-profit The Challenge Company, the rally required all participants to be part of its Adopt a Hero campaign. For every kilometer traveled, 10 Euro cents (14 US cents) would be donated to six non-profit organizations including HFH Mongolia. The other beneficiaries are Dutch charitable organizations Dance4Life, oneMen and SOS-Kinderdorpen, UK-based international development agency Plan and Canada-headquartered Right to Play.

More than two weeks after the rally started, the teams entered the rugged territory of Mongolia where they encountered some problems such as punctured tires and worn out parts such as springs and shock absorbers. Despite myriad challenges and running behind time, the participants' spirits were not dampened. Upon their arrival in the ancient capital of Kharkorin, central Mongolia, the participants were met by Habitat representatives and briefed about Habitat's work. A Mongolian barbecue dinner helped to revive the team members' spirits and they spent the night in *ger* (traditional Mongolian round felt tent).

The next morning, the refreshed participants joined a Habitat home partner in Kharkorin to build the foundation for his house. The 26 sq. m. house is made of concrete block, wooden supports and a metal roof sheet. The foreign volunteers attracted not just the attention of the Habitat home partner's relatives but also the governor of Kharkhorin county who showed up to bid the participants farewell.

The participants then drove another 400 km. to the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar where they visited a Habitat build site in Bio Kombinat area in Khan Uul district. The volunteers joined the Habitat workers to nail wooden frames that form the wall of the house and wooden planks for the flooring. A local broadcasting station, TV 9, covered the event.

The build ended with a dinner hosted by HFH Mongolia. Special guests included Ulaanbaatar deputy city manager, Amagalan Baayar, and another official from the Ulaanbaatar mayor's office. Mr Amagalan said: "I thank Habitat for their work of building houses and helping families with low incomes in Ulaanbaatar city. Let us continue to strengthen the existing partnership between the city government and Habitat." The Ulaanbaatar city government had granted HFH Mongolia a plot of land in the Bio Kombinat area to build 400 houses. To date, Habitat has completed more than 200 houses on the site and helped housed more than 300 low-income families in Ulaanbaatar.

Arthur Verheijen, who organized the Peking Challenge 2007 and took part in the rally, said: "I am glad that all cars raced for Habitat for Humanity. We enjoyed the county and the hospitality of the Mongolian people and will make every effort to come back to Mongolia with 50 vehicles next year."

Pieter Van Mullekom, who took part in the rally with his wife Gaby, commented: "I am touched by the work of Habitat and its staff who are committed to building simple houses to help families with low incomes in Mongolia. I have enjoyed very much the Mongolia leg of the rally, the beautiful people and the landscape of Mongolia. We will surely come back to Mongolia."



Fast cars: Teams taking part in the Peking Challenge 2007 rally going through the rugged terrain of Mongolia.



Driven: A rally participant hammering away at a wooden frame during a HFH Mongolia build in Ulaanbaatar.

Mongolia is among the favorite destinations of Habitat volunteer teams and in 2007 alone, HFH Mongolia has hosted volunteers from Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and the US. National director Charles Jolliffe said: "This is the first time we have volunteers from Holland (participants of the Peking Challenge rally) who made it a point to help families build. Volunteers with such sheer determination, motivation and commitment, and driving with a clear purpose to support a good cause, encourage Habitat to do more in fighting poverty housing and making a difference in the lives of families in need."

The 15 teams left Mongolia on 16th September 2007 to embark on the last 700 km. leg of the rally. They traveled through the Gobi desert to the small border town of Zaymin Uud before entering China. The rally was completed on 19th September 2007 with the teams marked their triumphant finish with a climb up the Great Wall of China.



Welcome break: Pieter Van Mullekom and his wife Gaby enjoyed the Mongolia leg of the rally and their volunteering stint with Habitat.