

Young Mexican visitors get a taste of rural Ontario

By Heather McCrae
Scugog Standard

While most of us are glad to see the end of the cold weather, and all the sports and activities that are associated with a Canadian winter, the white stuff still left on the ground has been a delight for 20 young people visiting here from various parts of Mexico.

On March 19, these young people and two group leaders arrived in Scugog Township and have been staying with host families in the hamlets of Blackstock and Nestleton.

They are taking part in a "mini-stay", which was arranged between Ingrid Brand, of Blackstock, and a friend in Toronto who owns an educational travel company.

"When my friend called, she asked if we'd be interested in hosting these young people. They wanted a country where they could get a new and different cultural opportunity, 'walk on water' and become familiar with a 'small town feeling,'" Mrs. Brand told *The Standard*.

Scugog Township seems to have fit the bill perfectly.

Twenty families have each taken in a visitor.

"We tried to match each visitor with a Canadian child their own age and gender," Mrs. Brand said.

When school resumed two weeks ago, our visitors participated in class activities at Cartwright Central Public School and Cartwright High School.

All of the Mexican visitors attend pri-

vate schools back home and speak English, some better than others.

The local School Community Councils have benefited from their arrivals. Instead of giving money to their host families, each visitor paid \$100 to the two schools' organizations.

The visitors and their hosts have been busy with all sorts of winter activities, as well as bowling, and had a tour of Van Lea Holsteins, a Blackstock dairy farm owned by Lawrence and Jan Van Camp.

Many had never been on a farm before and found the tour of the dairy operation an eye-opener.

"We're always willing to educate children about where their food comes from and from the looks on their faces, they seem to be enjoying their visit here today," Mr. Van Camp said.

Michelle Castilla, 12, of Cancun, liked the snow and the snowmobiling.

"This is the first time I have ever seen snow. I like it and was able to go snowmobiling and skated for the first time, too, without falling," she said, grinning. "It's all been cool."

Pablo Lamberto, 13, who lives near Mexico City, and is staying with Justyn Walsh and his family, enjoyed walking on the ice and said it was great meeting all the new kids. Shivering, he said he wants to come back again "when it's warmer."

On their own, the visitors from Mexico visited Niagara Falls, got to make some purchases at the Eaton Centre and enjoyed visits to the CN Tower and the



Over the past two weeks, 20 young visitors from Mexico have enjoyed being hosted by many families in Blackstock and Nestleton. Together, they took a tour of Lawrence and Jan Van Camp's dairy operation in Blackstock last week. The foreign visitors had never been on a farm before. Enjoying the animals are (L-R), Enrique Aguilar, (Mexico City), Justyn Walsh (Blackstock), Jan Van Camp (holding the calf), Aidan Blakely (Nestleton), Michelle Castilla (Cancun), and, in front, Pablo Lamberto, (Mexico City).

Rogers Centre.

"The whole experience has been a lot of fun," said Enrique Aguilar, 13.

"Everyone has been so kind to us and have gone out of their way to make this trip a memorable event," he said.

All the way from Afghanistan, with thanks



Cartwright Central P.S. students (from left) Matthew Van Camp, Brandon Yeomanson, Asta Hansen, Megan Stekel and Claudia Zilstra hold the Canadian flag that former pen pal Master Corporal Mark Wells (centre) brought back from Afghanistan as a gift for his young friends.