

Their mission: Helping Latin countries, people

By Barrie Collins
Register Staff

- **BETHANY** — Helping launch a worker-owned cheese factory in a Peruvian shanty town of 300,000 people.
- Building a two-mile irrigation canal in a dry rural village.
- Aiding poor mothers in a Guatemalan town to open a pre-school.
- Setting up training centers to

show communities how to help themselves, and

■ Introducing an unusual inter-cultural exchange program in Latin America for U.S. residents to "bridge the spaces between us and them."

These are a few of the projects to which George and Donnamarie West have dedicated themselves working with the Chicago-based Institute of Cultural Affairs.

The private, non-profit organization brings multi-cultural teams together in 33 countries to stimulate community initiatives in defining needs and marshalling local and outside contributions to solve them.

In the U.S. to seek resources for ICA's Latin American projects and to promote the Space Between "adventure" programs they developed, the couple recently stopped in Bethany to visit friends.

George West, an Alabamian who coordinates ICA's Peruvian activities, earned a divinity degree before moving into community development work and leadership programs in inner Chicago and

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Donnamarie West

s becoming involved

road. He has also helped U.S. companies develop participatory management. His wife, a Midwesterner and nurse, gave up a real estate practice to join ICA in Guatemala.

ICA has "a finger in anything people need," from a community cell system to reforestation, said David Calhoun, a Bethany resident who has taken part in Space Between programs with his wife, Luva.

The Calhouns then invited a number of interested Bethany residents to learn more about the ICA's work and possibly to become involved in the programs.

Meanwhile, the Wests are touring the United States and Canada through June to spread the ICA message.

Latin America's size and geography cause immense difficulties in unifying anything in or between its nations, George West said. Gross economic and social disparities, multiple languages and poor communication (one telephone serves 30,000 people in one Guatemalan area) have handicapped Latin Americans in developing "a sense of being a people." This has created a feeling of powerlessness, especially among the Indians, West said.

To help overcome this, ICA seeks receptive rural communities near major cities to develop training centers and demonstration projects that will inspire other villages, West said. One of them, Azitua, Peru, received a government award for installing electricity and potable water, improving old irrigation canals, building a new school and starting a beekeeping industry.

"Working together is where our power is," Donnamarie West said.

The Wests designed the Space Between program, which is held in Mexico, Guatemala and Peru, because, "We heard a cry and need. People wanted a deeper (travel) experience. They were not really

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Donnamarie and George West, who are currently working on community development projects in Peru with the Institute of Cultural Affairs, their recent visit to Bethany.

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Each three-week, in-depth program moves from a village to the capital and the country's "sacred space." The programs include social interaction and workdays with villagers, visits to museums, a hacienda and schools and meeting people in many walks of life. Exploring the "sacred spaces" take trip members to Mayan temples and "the lost city of the Incas."

The couple sees the exchanges as a first step in helping create the global awareness that enhances understanding and peace. The program address is 4750 N. Sheridan Road, Chicago, Ill. 60640.

Although ICA assignments in future years may take the Wests to new places, they know the community work will be challenging and satisfying because, "Home is where we are," Donnamarie West said.