

# El Salvadorians latest helped by Fernandez

by **GLENN COOK**  
Saint City News

Victor Fernandez just loves making people smile, whether they are firefighters or not.

Fernandez, himself a member of St. Albert Fire Services and president of Canadian Aid for Fire Services Abroad, is usually collecting firefighting gear to send to brigades in developing countries. But when the organization recently got a request to help people in El Salvador in the wake of hurricane Ida, he couldn't say no.

"If the possibility is there and I can do it, you don't have to qualify to be a fire department or whatever ... I'm making a lot of people happy," he said with a laugh.

CAFSA was contacted by the Edmonton Salvadorian Association, and in just four weeks, put together \$220,000 worth of medical goods to ship to the country. The equipment included 30 wheelchairs, 30 walkers, 30 bed covers, crutches, canes and boxes upon boxes of medical supplies like bandages, syringes and respiratory

masks.

"It came from hospitals, from people who pass away; their wheelchairs and walkers," Fernandez said.

"We don't need it, but they desperately need it," he added.

"Hurricane Ida, it did a lot of damage to El Salvador. ... They are extremely happy for this donation. They say it is sent by God. They couldn't believe it."

Fernandez became aware of hurricane Ida while in San Pablo, Guatemala, in late October, as he and several other CAFSA members delivered two fire trucks to that city.

The Category 1 storm made its first landfall near the hamlet of Tasbapauni, Nicaragua, on Wednesday, Nov. 4.

In El Salvador, the storm has been blamed for floods and mudslides that killed at least 124 people, although some reports say that a separate Pacific low-pressure system, and not the hurricane, caused those.

Regardless of the cause, Fernandez was more than willing to lend a hand.

"The people in the Latin community, they knew about me. And they didn't know who to ask for help," Fernandez said.

In fact, the day before he got the call from El Salvador, Fernandez was talking with other members of CAFSA about what they were going to do with a surplus of medical equipment they had in storage. "We had these medical supplies, and what are we going to do with it?" he asked. "We're going to have to find somebody to give it to, or offer it to somebody. And the next day, these people phoned me.

The connection was unbelievable; it was kind of scary." CAFSA has been taking new and used firefighting equipment to developing countries like Chile, Ecuador, Colombia and Guatemala since 2004. The medical supplies will be delivered to El Salvador on Wednesday and Thursday, with a representative from the Edmonton Salvadorian Association accompanying it down. But even with this atypical venture for the organization, Fernandez said he's not worried about people from all corners of the world knocking down CAFSA's doors wanting aid that has little to do with firefighting.



PHOTO PROVIDED

**Victor Fernandez (left), member of St. Albert Fire Services and president of Canadian Aid for Fire Services Abroad, helped accumulate \$220,000 worth of medical equipment for victims of hurricane Ida.**

"A lot of people come to us for help, especially to me," he said. "They see me on the street and they talk to me. I'm willing to help anybody who needs the help. My strongest point is firefighting and [emergency medical services], but if I can do something for you on the way there, it's no issue." For more information on CAFSA and the work they do, check out their website at <http://www.cafsa.net>.