

CAFSA determined to keep on truckin'

by **GLENN COOK**
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It has been a tough slog at times, but Victor Fernandez is determined to keep on truckin'.

Fernandez is a member of the St. Albert Fire Department and the president of Canadian Aid for Fire Services Abroad (CAFSA), which is in the middle of the largest undertaking in its history — getting a donated aerial fire truck to the city of Azogues, Ecuador.

But dealing with the logistics

of actually getting the truck from Canada to South America has been a bit of a struggle.

"I don't think the word is 'excited;' it's more relief," Fernandez said.

The truck, worth more than \$100,000, was donated to CAFSA by the City of St. Albert when it was scheduled to be replaced. CAFSA decided to give the truck to the fire department in Azogues as part of their latest mission to deliver firefighting equipment to those who need it in poorer countries.

But there were many hurdles in the

way, including a lot of bureaucratic red tape and paperwork, as well as dealing with shipping companies.

"The logistic nightmare was that, every company, they want containers," Fernandez said. "But this truck is such a big truck that it doesn't fit in any container."

So, given the amount of space the truck takes up, CAFSA has had to pay for the space for three containers to get it to Ecuador.

But all the wrinkles have been ironed out, and the truck left on the back of a massive semi trailer unit in

late January.

"Believe it or not, this truck went to New York by land, and then from New York, they'll take it to Ecuador," he said. "In Ecuador, it will probably sit for a month until all the paperwork is ready on that end."

The city of Azogues also had to raise enough money to pay to have the truck shipped there.

"They came a little short, but I think the government gave the rest," he said. "They're excited to get it; they can't wait."

Fernandez and a few other CAFSA

volunteers are aiming to head back to Azogues — they were there in October to deliver most of the equipment — in May to train the firefighters there on how to use the truck.

"I've been sending letters and trying to cover ourselves, saying, 'Hey, do not operate this until we give you the full training.' I hope we're successful in that," Fernandez said. "I don't know if those guys can keep their hands off [the truck]. I know they're going to try and do it themselves."

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Donation a learning experience

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But Fernandez knows this is a worthwhile operation, not only for the firefighters in Ecuador, but for his organization as well.

"This also brings to CAFSA credibility. We learned a lot about this process; it was 123-plus pages of paperwork

between CAFSA and the Ecuadorian embassy in Ottawa, and then finding a shipping line who will take it down," he said.

And this learning experience is something the organization will be able to draw on in the future.

"I've learned now that, when you donate something, the

country has to agree for you to donate it," he said. "You just can't give it away, especially an item like that.

"The City of St. Albert, and especially Chief [Ray] Richards, they were very decent for us, because they kept the unit for us, they believed in us. They said, 'Here it is; show us you can do it.' And we did it."