

Former Canandaiguan brings 'healing' to Bosnia

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

ROCHESTER — Imagine earning a medical degree from a prestigious university and securing a job in a hospital in Southern California.

Most people would be satisfied with such accomplishments. Kate O'Hanlon was not.

The Canandaigua-native forfeited her position at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center to spend six months in war-torn Bosnia. While there, she helped establish an emergency room in a Bosnian hospital.

"I was just kind of ready to make a change in my work," O'Hanlon said. "I was ready to do something different."

And, O'Hanlon added, "I was sort of up for adventure."

The "adventure" began earlier this year for the University of Rochester Medical School graduate and former member of Canandaigua's St. Mary's Parish.

O'Hanlon began looking at that time for an agency that sent volunteers overseas. She discovered the Los Angeles-based International Medical Corps.

The organization's officials said they could use a doctor with O'Hanlon's expertise — she's an emergency-room physician — to help establish emergency services at a hospital located in Zenica in central Bosnia.

At first, O'Hanlon acknowledged, she hesitated to commit because of the potential dangers from the fighting between Croats and Muslims. "A lot of people told me not to go," she recalled.

But friends who had been to Bosnia reassured her that the volunteers were well protected. And just after she decided to go, a cease-fire agreement was reached.

When O'Hanlon arrived in Zenica last March, the situation was relatively peaceful, she noted — except for occasional



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Canandaigua-native Kate O'Hanlon recently returned from a six-month stay in Bosnia, where she helped establish emergency-room services at a hospital in Zenica, located in central Bosnia.

shelling by Serbians who had artillery on a nearby mountain. "They weren't that close," O'Hanlon remarked matter-of-factly. "It wasn't that often."

Indeed, O'Hanlon's biggest problems were dealing with power and water rationing, coupled with the lack of equipment she needed to establish an emergency room and train personnel. "Some didn't even know how to take blood pressure," she observed.

O'Hanlon was impressed by the Bosnian doctors, however.

"The doctors were very adept there," O'Hanlon said. "They just were kind of 30 years behind us because of the kind

of society they lived in. Really, it's this war that's forcing them to meet the Western world and keep up with it a little bit."

All of the ethnic groups involved in the fighting were represented on the hospital's staff, O'Hanlon noted, but that did not seem to pose any problems with working together.

"I think basically they wanted to get along, especially because they did for so many years," O'Hanlon said.

As part of her work, the Canandaigua native went out to villages to teach emergency medical procedures at clinics. Some of those villages were located near

the front lines where Serbian and Muslim forces were engaged in fierce fighting. Even then, however, the closest she came to fighting was usually at least 15 kilometers, she estimated.

O'Hanlon did more than just teach, however. She also learned about the nature of the conflict, and her own preconceptions.

"I had this attitude when I went over there, 'I'm going to save the world,'" O'Hanlon said.

She also acknowledged that she had at times wondered why the people didn't simply stop fighting and get on with

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Coalition of churches, groups to form a credit union

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — About 30 people Nov. 20 gathered at St. Bridget's Church, 175 St. Bridget's Drive, to discuss plans to establish a credit union for low-income residents in the city's northeast and southeast sections.

The Greater Rochester Community of Churches, a coalition of 20 Catholic and Protestant churches and community groups, is proposing the credit union through its Community Development Economics Task Force.

The task force released the second draft of a paper on the credit union at last Sunday's meeting.

According to task force members, the credit union, which will be called the Progressive Neighborhood Federal Credit Union, would probably have one main office along with several satellite facilities throughout the area. Currently, such urban areas are home to only a handful of banks, and many residents don't even have bank accounts or easy access to credit of any kind, the paper noted.

A task force brochure added that, as late as 1992, "the mortgage lending rate for Rochester was less than half of the rate for the rest of the metropolitan area." The brochure added that "the rate for the inner city ... was less than one-fourth of the rate for the whole area."

To meet city residents' need for credit options, the union will provide low-interest loans for such basic needs as car repairs and home appliances. The Rev. Natalie Hanson, a United Methodist minister and task force member, told meeting participants that eventually the

credit union would also make loans to small entrepreneurs who wish to start businesses, and to families who want to rehabilitate their homes.

Anyone can become a member of the credit union by opening a savings account with at least \$5, according to information provided by the task force.

So far, 850 residents responded to a credit union survey distributed at area polling places last Election Day, noted Juanita Alvarez-Lopez, a member of the task force and head of the Coalition of North East Associations.

Alvarez-Lopez added that the city's Hispanics are particularly interested in seeing a credit union come to their neighborhoods.

"Credit unions are more used in Puerto Rico than banks," she said.

She explained that many Hispanics currently have no banks in their neighborhoods, forcing them to keep money under their mattresses or in cans around their homes. Such habits make them vulnerable to theft and burglary, she remarked.

During the meeting, the Rev. Hanson

called on participants to volunteer their help in designing the credit union, and to raise financial support from their congregations. Federal regulators ruled the first week of November that the credit union would qualify for low-income status, and, hence, would be able to raise deposits from such outside sources as foundations and churches.

"We need equity, equity, equity," the Rev. Hanson said.

Meeting participants were given surveys asking them for input into the credit union, and whether they wanted to hear task force members speaking at their church. The survey also asked whether participants wanted to be kept

informed through occasional mailings of the credit union's progress and whether the participants' congregation wanted to become a long-term investor.

The Rev. Hanson also asked for congregations to write support letters to be used in the credit union's charter application. The union hopes to be chartered by next spring, according to Sister Beth LeValley, SSJ, GRCC's vice president.

EDITORS' NOTE: For information about the credit union, please write: The Progressive Neighborhood Task Force, 410 Chili Ave., Rochester, N.Y. 14611; or call Alan, 716/328-2422.

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The staff at the Catholic Courier congratulates Retired Bishop Joseph L. Hogan, who Nov. 28 will mark the 25th anniversary of his installation as bishop of the Diocese of Rochester.

