

Helping Others is a Real Summer Break for This UC San Diego Student

Receives \$10,000 scholarship to benefit Project Nicaragua

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For many students, summer vacation means YEE-HA! - a break, time off for fun and games. For University of California, San Diego student Allen Ho it means one, if not two, trips to Nicaragua as a volunteer to help the medically underserved people of that country.

Ho will participate as campus director and president of UCSD's chapter of Project Nicaragua, a nonprofit organization working to improve healthcare and the quality of life in Nicaragua. For his resourcefulness, Ho has been awarded a \$10,000 Donald A. Strauss Public Service Scholarship to be used for UCSD's Project Nicaragua activities.

"Our chapter just organized early this year and we have been doing many fundraising activities, such as barbecues," says Ho, an economics major and pre-med student as well. "I heard about the Strauss Public Service Foundation and applied for a grant for the project."

Ho, whose home is in Irvine, is one of 14 California students to receive the \$10,000 scholarship to be used toward a project to be carried out during their senior year. Ho says that among project targets for the money will be the shipping charges for expensive neurosurgical equipment to Nicaragua and microscopes and other supplies related to a study on intestinal parasites in the country.

Ho is one of 30 undergraduate students in the UCSD chapter and says that at this point their trips to Nicaragua to volunteer "comes out of pocket," the students footing the costs. "We hope that as we grow and expand our volunteers and donors and receive more grants, the project can help with these expenses." With a keen interest in medical care for those in need, Ho also goes to Tijuana once a quarter with a team of doctors, dentists and other volunteers who serve hundreds of the city's men, women and children with varying medical problems. For Project Nicaragua, the UCSD volunteers meet weekly to organize fundraising, recruiting events, collaborations, and plan their trips to Nicaragua. Ho recently spearheaded a project partnership with the International Neurosurgical Children's Association (INCA), a nonprofit organization that identifies hospitals in need of support and provides them with equipment and training. It is lead by director Rahul Jandial, M.D., a senior resident surgeon with UCSD Neurosurgery and an instructor at UCSD, and lead surgeon Michael Levy, M.D., Ph.D., director of Pediatric Neurosurgery at Rady Children's Hospital and Health Center. Ho says the collaboration will include multiple training expeditions made by INCA's neurosurgical team to Managua, Nicaragua, with Project Nicaragua helping in whatever ways needed.

Ho says Project Nicaragua also is "working closely with El Hospital Antonino Lenin Fonseca (main hospital to nine of the country's 12 neurosurgeons) in Managua to bring more surgical training teams, supplies and equipment, and general assistance to the capital city."

"Also, we have recently developed a relationship with AMOS Health and Hope, a Nicaraguan rural community health organization. Together we will be conducting country wide prevalence studies and treatment of endemic

diseases in Nicaragua in addition to constructing and maintaining a community health clinic in the indigenous Mosquito region of northeast Nicaragua."

Big plans and high hopes. Ho says he has always been interested in how the needs are served in underdeveloped countries. He plans to enter UCSD Medical School in 2009 - but he is leaving specific plans as a doctor to the future, now enjoying and learning from his current experiences.

"It is a pleasure to work with other undergraduates at UCSD who are concerned about the needs of people less fortunate," Ho says.

The Donald A. Strauss Public Service Scholarship Foundation was established in 1997 as a memorial to the late Don Strauss of Newport Beach who demonstrated a life-long commitment to public service and education.

Strauss served on the Newport-Mesa Unified School District Board and the Newport Beach City Council, founded summer internships in Washington, D.C., for university students, and endowed scholarships at Stanford, UC Irvine, and Harvey Mudd. He died in 1995.

This is the foundation's 10th year of awarding public service scholarships. Ho says UCSD's Project Nicaragua chapter welcomes volunteers and is in need of donations to support its activities. For further information, contact Ho at (949) 466-6067 or aho@ucsd.edu.

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