



Walt Weis/Daily Bulletin

Andy Houghton of Casa Colina Centers for Rehabilitation in Pomona works on a wheel for a chair he'll be taking to Bosnia. Casa Colina contributed wheelchairs, adaptive sporting equipment and educational material for shipment to children in Bosnia.

Pomona group to aid Bosnia kids

Wheelchairs, balls on way to war-torn land

By Wyatt Haupt
Daily Bulletin

POMONA — A local rehabilitation center is preparing to send supplies to hospitals in Tuzla and Sarajevo Friday, as part of a 50-ton airlift relief shipment for the children of war-torn Bosnia.

Casa Colina Centers for Rehabilitation contributed 15 state-of-the-art wheelchairs, adaptive sporting equipment, basketballs, hockey sticks and educational material for the shipment, arranged by PeaceWorks and the International Rescue Committee. The groups are humanitarian organizations based in Charleston, S.C.

Andy Houghton, director of the center's Wheelchair Sports Program, said he got involved with the project after he was contacted by PeaceWorks to assist and educate the children in the region who

have suffered severe spinal cord injuries.

"The organization called me up and asked if I wanted to come along and help educate the kids in the use of the equipment we were donating," he said. "It's an incredible opportunity to go over there and help — to be able to expand and change people's lives is terrific," Houghton said.

Houghton, 29, who injured his spinal chord in a motorcycle accident 10 years ago and has been in a wheelchair ever since, has worked with disabled people at the center through a variety of innovative sports programs.

He said he hopes to set up wheelchair sports programs, such as basketball and hockey, for the children during his 10-day stay in Bosnia.

"There is no way for these kids to get around and they really need something to do, so hopefully I can motivate them and get them interested in a sports program," Houghton said.

Melek Zimmer, 28, who founded Peaceworks three years ago to provide

humanitarian relief for children in war zones, said this will be the third and biggest airlift the organization has put together for the children of Bosnia since war broke out in the region.

"We invited over 25 different groups around the country and 6,000 school children from 80 different nations to participate in the effort," she said.

She said the group is shipping a variety of things to the children, including medical and school supplies.

"Once the effort is complete, we will have donated over 60 tons of humanitarian supplies to Bosnia over the last three years," Zimmer said.

Zimmer said the relief effort has the blessings of the U.S. State Department and the Department of Defense.

"We needed their support to get the supplies into the region," she said.

A C5 Air Force cargo plane will leave Charleston Air Force Base on Friday and take the supplies into the region. Once there, the IRC will distribute them to the various locations.