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# Anna man follows his heart

**By Jim Painter**
Staff Writer

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ALEX FREISTHLER, of Anna, examines a young girl during his medical mission trip to Honduras this past winter. Freisthler, 23, will graduate as a registered nurse from the University of Cincinnati in June and plans to return to Honduras for another year in the mission field. Photo provided

Freisthler

ANNA - When Alex Freisthler, a 2003 graduate of Anna High School, arrived at the University of Cincinnati he was pursuing a career in planning and design. He soon learned that another plan and design would bring him more fulfillment and a sense of making a difference.

In June, the 23-year-old Freisthler will graduate from the University of Cincinnati's nursing program. A far cry from his first career choice, he began looking at physical therapy because he was a "people person."

"I just wanted something where I could work with people. I learned about the nursing program and wasn't sure. Now I know it was the right move," Freisthler told the Sidney Daily News.

He is the son of Pat and Deb Freisthler, 207 Cherry Lane, Anna.

This past winter, Freisthler worked in the medical missionary field through his studies. His travels took him to Intubuca, Honduras, where he went "to serve the poorest of the poor in the rural areas of the country". So moved by the experience, he has relinquished a position as a registered nurse in UC's University Hospital emergency room to return to Honduras.

Freisthler will spend another year caring for the medically disadvantaged.

"During that time I was touched by the people and their culture, and I left with a strong desire to do more. There is a simplicity to life there. They are genuine people who live in poverty. I truly believe I was making a difference," Freisthler said.

"I was there with a group of people who started talking about what they were missing and looking to get back to. I realized I wasn't ready to go back (home) yet and decided to go back," he added.

Upon his return, UC Professor Tina Weitkamp, who organized the trip, urged Freisthler to return when he expressed the desire. He said Weitkamp instilled in him the true purpose of the nursing profession.

"To me it was nursing (medicine) in its purest form. I felt like treating those people in Honduras was what nursing

meant to me and it felt right. As I progressed through this field, many areas have caught my eye, including emergency care. I feel like I can really make a difference for these people. I also learned how lucky we are here (in the U.S.)," he said.

Freisthler is aligned with Shoulder to Shoulder of Cincinnati, a non-profit, non-governmental organization that has been serving the poor of Honduras since 1990. They have established three clinics there having partnered with doctors and dentists, and operate solely off donations.

Freisthler was one of eight nursing students and Weitkamp from UC to travel to Honduras. Also going were three nurse practitioner students from Western Carolina University, three medical students from Johns Hopkins University, and a general practitioner, a dentist and six interpreters from a bilingual school in La Ceiba, Honduras.

The group conducted well child and mother assessments, but examined other family members as people were rarely were turned away, he said.

In 10 days, the group saw more than 500 children, parents and grandparents. Students went on home visits by foot and monitored of living conditions, dental hygiene, clean water and hand-washing education. Other dental and vision care was administered.

Freisthler reported the group encountered malnutrition, dental problems, scabies, gastrointestinal parasites, arthritis, dehydration, gun shot and machete wounds, untreated broken bones, hearing and vision loss, bacterial infections, untreated birth defects and respiratory illnesses including pneumonia, TB and asthma due to smoke inhalation.

The group slept mostly on floors in schools inside mosquito nets. Cold showers and latrine style toilets flushed by hand were common. They traveled on dirt roads in four-by-four vehicles to smaller towns. Freisthler said many of the mountains village had breathtaking views.

In July, Freisthler will travel to La Antigua Guatemala for a one-month language immersion school that will focus on medical language. He will then travel to Santa Lucia, Honduras, to work in the clinic for a year.

While there, he will treat patients in collaboration with doctors, operate an X-ray machine, educate the community along with Hondurans entering the nursing field on nursing procedures.

He hopes to start a rabies vaccination program for local dogs, aid in government documents relating to Shoulder to Shoulder's future within the country, and assist in opening of new clinic in Concepcion, Honduras.

He plans to return to the U.S. in September 2009.

Freisthler is in the process of raising $8,500 to fund his year-long stay. The money will be used for language school, travel expenses, supplies, health insurance and minor living expenses. The trip is completely voluntary as is the service of all members who work through Shoulder to Shoulder, he explained.

For those wishing to donate, Freisthler suggests visiting the Shoulder to Shoulder Web site at www.shouldertoshoulder.org to learn of the organization. By accessing the "We Need Help" link, online donations can be made directly in Freisthler's name.

He said those wishing to contact him direct can do so by mail at 735 Delta Ave. Apt. C2, Cincinnati, OH 45226. His cell phone is (937) 726-6186. He can reached by e-mail at freistae@email.uc.edu.

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