

2 planes to spread Wings of Hope

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Two small airplanes will be brought together in St. Louis Wednesday for a long journey south, where they will spread Wings of Hope to people living in the jungles of Honduras.



Gervais

Guy Gervais, a French-Canadian pilot for the St. Louis-based organization, which provides airplanes and communications to remote areas of the world.

Gervais has logged 15,000 hours flying over South and Central America, transporting food, medicine, agricultural supplies and teachers to settlements that are days away by ground from cities, but minutes away by air.

The planes often aid disaster relief efforts, but more often assist farmers trying to improve their lives.

"THERE ARE city slums where people live with no water and no food. They have no money to buy things," Gervais said. "There are huge, beautiful, very fertile valleys, but there are no roads. It's no good to put people in isolation."

But with the Honduran government offering 10 acres to those who will farm it, and with Wings of Hope establishing a transportation link, the poor gladly seek a new life in the wilderness.

"They love it. Freedom is a wonderful thing," Gervais said. "In the slums they are nothing, nobody. But after five years they will own their land. They are millionaires."

The newest planes in the Wings of Hope fleet, donated by three St. Louisans, face no easy life in the

Central American bush, Gervais warned.

"WE GO ANY place there are no other aircraft," he said with a heavy French accent. "Building an airstrip is no easy job. Sometimes you walk two days to find a place to build one, and then there might be mahogany trees two or three feet in diameter to take down."

Even after a strip is completed, Gervais said, it might be rocky, uneven, surrounded by trees and muddy after rainfall. Jungle flying is hard on planes and pilots, who must work without weather information and perform their own maintenance.

The new utility planes are the 36th and 37th flown by Wings of Hope, Gervais estimated. Most have worn out or been donated to other humanitarian organizations, which continue transport services established by Wings of Hope. The two new planes will meet at Lambert St. Louis International Airport for flights to Honduras next week.

ONE OF THE planes, a Cessna 206 donated by Margaretha C. Jordan, of Webster Groves, is named the Ed Mack Miller Memorial Airplane in honor of a late United Airlines pilot and Wings of Hope volunteer. Mrs. Jordan's son, Donald, is an American Airlines pilot who also is a volunteer.

The second plane, a Cessna 205, was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Richard Kliefoth, of St. Louis County. Kliefoth, now retired, was an engineer for Remmert-Werner Aviation and McDonnell Douglas Corp.

Wings of Hope was begun in 1962 by a group of St. Louisans who heard of missionaries needing a plane to continue their work in Kenya. After they raised money for that plane, requests for more planes and pilots arrived. Wings of Hope was incorporated as a non-profit, non-sectarian corporation and began soliciting businesses, mostly aviation-related, across the country.