

# Daily Record

SERVING MORRIS COUNTY FOR MORE THAN 100 YEARS

## Helping is easy for Morristown native



**Special to Morristown This Week**  
Constantine 'Gus' Mavraganis, who was born and raised in Morristown and now lives in Chester Township, is leader of two nonprofit organizations that travel to Third World countries to help build homes, tend to AIDS victims and help bring clean water to villages that have next to nothing.

BY LISA MARTONE

SPECIAL TO MORRISTOWN THIS WEEK

Wednesday, July 9, 2008

Constantine Mavraganis of Chester Township has brought people as young as 8 and as old as 83 with him on his journeys.

"It's never too late and you're certainly never too young to learn to reach out to people," he said. "Many of the people who have traveled with me have built lifelong relationships with the people they have met."

Mavraganis, who was born and raised in Morristown, is leader of two nonprofit organizations that travel to Third World countries to help build homes, tend to AIDS victims and help bring clean water to villages that have next to nothing.

"I take people from all over the country," he said. "It is an experience you would never forget."

Mavraganis, 49, is leader of the Cuba AIDS Project, a nonprofit group that supports HIV/AIDS patients in Havana and Cienfuegos. Since 1999, he has brought hundreds of medical students, teenagers and adults interested in outreach and volunteer work to the area.

He is also founder of Hands of Humanity, a nonprofit that is focused on clean water and sanitation, building homes and clinics in areas of the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

"I have been to many parts of the world, but the devastation in Haiti is like nothing I have ever seen," he said.

Hands of Humanity is a similar type of volunteer group. Mavraganis takes these groups of volunteers to areas in the Dominican Republic and Haiti to help build water wells to obtain clean drinking water, clinics where the less fortunate can receive health care, and homes to live in.

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Those who travel with Mavraganis stay in the cities outside of the devastated areas. He gives travelers plenty of time to tour the cities and lounge on the beaches in between volunteer efforts.

"I really encourage people to come," he said. "Instead of going to a resort for 10 days, come and get your hands dirty; we will have a little fun, but the main mission is to help make a difference."

His full-time job, as a Realtor with ReMax Properties in Morristown, gives him the flexibility he needs to travel and organize trips.

"I sell real estate because I am good at it, having been involved in many transactions in my life and it also allows me the flexibility to take groups to Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti," he said.

Mavraganis grew up in Morristown, a city that he said helped him enjoy and accept different cultures.

"Growing up in Morristown during the 1960s and 1970s, it was a melting pot of immigrants, culture and color," he said. "I couldn't have asked for a better place to grow up. I never thought twice about people's ethnicity or race. It was just normal for us."

Mavraganis credits his parents, immigrants from Greece, and his time spent there as a youth for giving him the desire and burden on his heart to help others.

"I think international travel and getting down and dirty with the Third World puts life into perspective for people," he said.

"It's something that affects you in a positive way for the rest of your life. It also lets you see that despite the sometimes extreme poverty they face, their lives are similar to ours in many ways.

"It's about family, love, life and the quest for happiness. It's very humbling to see people with nothing look you in the eyes and tell you how happy they are."

For more information or to join Mavraganis on one of his trips, visit [www.cubaaidproject.com](http://www.cubaaidproject.com) or [www.handsofhumanity.org](http://www.handsofhumanity.org).