

'Nova grad recounts Wasala's water woes

■ Matt Nespoli hopes his film raises awareness, funds for Nicaraguans.

By **STEPHANIE K. WHALEN**

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When most college students were thinking about which beach to visit for Spring Break, Villanova graduate Matt Nespoli planned a trip to one of the most poverty-stricken areas in the world.

During his sophomore year at Villanova, Nespoli and a group of friends set out for Wasala, a rural community in Nicaragua plagued with disease and limited access to clean drinking water.

He said what he saw there changed his life.

Saturday, from 7-9 p.m. in the Connelly Center's Villanova Room, Villanovans will get a chance to see why during the premiere of a documentary detailing life in Wasala and Nespoli's efforts to change it.

The Cardinal O'Hara graduate said he hoped the film would spread awareness and generate funds for Water for Wasala, a program he spearheaded to provide healthy drinking water to the community that tugged at his heartstrings.

"I saw that the lack of water sanitation made for a pretty dire situation," Nespoli said. "What really moved me was hearing this face-to-face with community members. It was then that we made a promise to work to get efficient water sys-

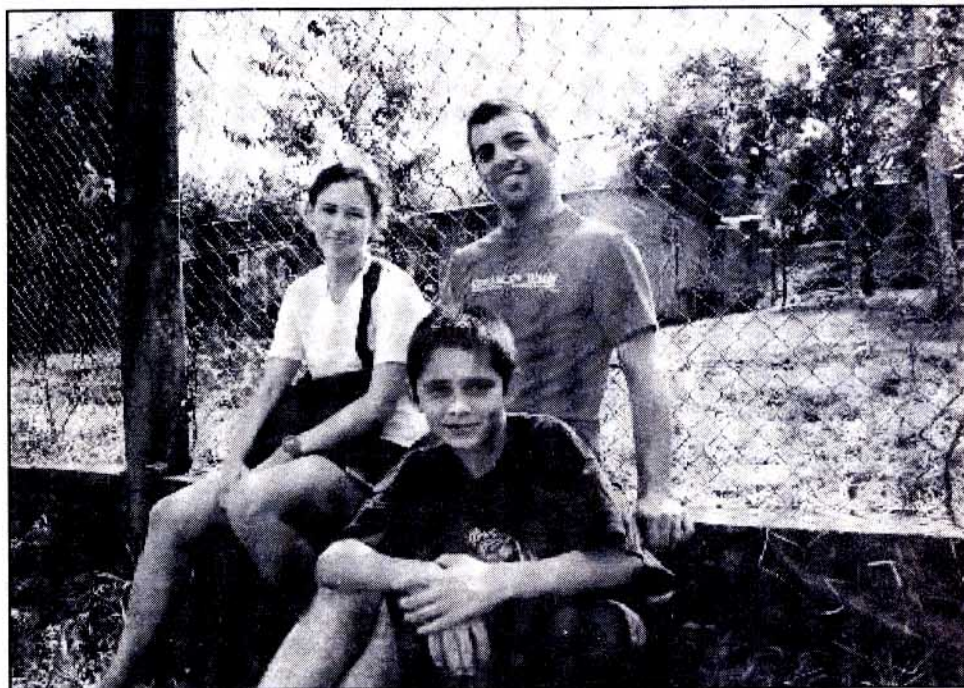
tems."

Since his most recent return home to the United States in 2003, Nespoli has volunteered at 26 area schools, speaking to roughly 10,000 students throughout the tri-state area about his experiences over several trips to Wasala since 2002.

Now at the ripe age of 22, Nespoli said Water for Wasala has raised \$51,000 — an extraordinary feat, considering the \$3,000 he first helped raise at Cardinal O'Hara before the organization's official birth.

Before Water for Wasala, he said he routinely witnessed children fetch drinking water for their families that was polluted with pesticides, soil and fecal matter. This, in a country where the "luxurious" method of transportation is mule.

"In Wasala alone, there are 85 isolated communities of 45,000 people," he said, "and all families were



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Matt Nespoli, right, poses with Nora Pillard, a 2002 Villanova grad, and Oscar, a local Nicaraguan boy, at a Wasalan soccer game.

forced to go to the local river about a half-hour to an hour away to fill their bucket with drinking water for the day.

"The entire community bathed, drank and washed clothing in the same river."

After Nespoli sent the first modest donation of \$3,000 to the area, he said

a local contractor at a parish in Wasala built simple water systems from natural springs in the mountains that flowed into a reservoir tank, through a pipe connected to local neighborhoods.

"That spring in 2003, I returned to Wasala my junior year, officially with

Villanova for a week to see the system installed," he said. "And it worked."

"It was a big party. It was great."

By summer's end, Water for Wasala officially became an idea in a 45-page proposal. Initially, Nespoli said he wanted to apply for nonprofit status, but he said the IRS warned him it would be almost impossible to send money abroad after 9/11 at his age.

During his senior year, Nespoli met with Augustinian Volunteers, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization with ties to Villanova, which agreed to jump-start the program.

After graduating in May 2004, he returned to Wasala with film-savvy friends in an effort to bring the community's plight to Delaware County and beyond.

"(Saturday) is the first time we're showing the full 45-minute documentary," he said. "I wanted people here to see with their own eyes what I saw at Wasala."

Admission is \$12, with proceeds going to Water for Wasala, said Nespoli, who hopes to raise \$100,000 by year's end.