



Westmeath volunteers prepare to depart

After months of thorough preparation, over 2,000 volunteers, including 48 volunteers from Westmeath, are preparing to leave today to work in the township of Khayelitsha in Cape Town, South Africa.

"This is the largest group of volunteers ever to leave the shores of Ireland, it is an historic occasion," said Niall Mellon, founder of the Niall Mellon Township Trust. "It demonstrates the deep commitment of Irish people to help the less fortunate wherever they may be." The charity has built over 10,000 houses since its inception in 2002.

"This would not have been possible without the help of so many Irish people," said Mr Mellon. "In light of the economic downturn in Ireland, I am particularly proud of the effort all of them have made to come on this year's trip. This brings the total number of Irish volunteers who have worked in the Niall Mellon project to over 5,000 since its inception in 2002."

During the week of

the building blitz, the charity has set itself the ambitious target of completing over 250 houses for over 3,000 people who currently live in appalling poverty in the township. The building blitz is an annual one-week volunteer trip organised by the NMTT, in which Irish volunteers build houses for families living in abject poverty.

Against the backdrop of difficult economic circumstances at home and internationally, the charity has succeeded in assembling a volunteer force of 2,000. Niall Mellon, founder of the NMTT said: "As we embark on the sixth annual building blitz, our largest to date, I am humbled by the generosity and spirit of the Irish people and in particular of our volunteers, who are the cornerstone of this charity. A large number of our volunteers are from the construction sector. We are deeply humbled that they have worked so hard this year to raise the target of €5,000 each. Many of these people have had a

tough year personally, some of them have been let go from their jobs and despite all of this, their determination has shone through and they have worked extra hard to raise the €5,000."

Mr Mellon continued, "Through the support of many Irish people all over our island, we have managed this year to build 5,000 houses. Our trip lasts only one week but it is an incredible week for all those who come. At the end of this long week hundreds of poor South African families will have homes for life when they had nothing at the start of the week. Every person should make it one of their life ambitions to go on one of these trips and the fact that 878 of this year's volunteers are veterans of previous trips highlights the life changing nature of the blitz."

The volunteers come from all walks of life, include all ages and from right across the country. The volunteers who participate come from a variety of professions ranging from skilled

tradespeople and CEO's, to nurses, doctors, firemen, and even a fisherman.

The Building Blitz is an important part of the work undertaken by NMTT, a charity which operates a year round house building programme in South Africa. Now active in 23 townships, the NMTT is the largest charity provider of homes for low income families in South Africa and has built more than 10,000 houses since its inception in 2002.

Since the NMTT was founded in 2002, more than 5,000 Irish volunteers have participated in the charity's building blitzes.

The township of Khayelitsha is located over 30 kilometers from Cape Town and has over 1 million inhabitants. It is the largest township in Cape Town and the third largest in South Africa. The majority of residents have no access to water, electricity or sanitation and it is one of the most marginalised and poverty-stricken townships in South Africa.