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## **U of L community organizes fundraiser to help people in Puerto Rico**

***Donors will receive greeting created by Lethbridge artist April Matisz***

Growing up in Puerto Rico, Francisco Gomez Jimenez, a University of Lethbridge doctoral student, knew the island as a tropical paradise. But the view through the plane window as his flight descended into the airport at San Juan on Sept. 30 was shocking.

“Puerto Rico was brown. There were no leaves on the trees. It looked like a completely different place from the one I last visited in June,” he says. “It’s always this lush, green island. Now it’s barren. It’s just devastated.”

Gomez Jimenez arrived 10 days after Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico. While he knew his family and friends had survived, he wasn’t prepared for the devastation on the ground. The main roads had been cleared of debris but almost all of the power lines were on the ground, a billboard had smashed into a house, signs were toppled over and debris from the storm was everywhere.

Most people in Puerto Rico are still without power more than a month after the hurricane. Water treatment plants are not working and people are turning to rivers and streams for water. Mosquitoes are thick and illnesses like leptospirosis are on the rise. People line up for eight to 12 hours at gas stations and wait for service at banks and the few stores that are open for business. Malls that are open are congested with people. Temperatures are above 30 C and there’s no electricity to run air-conditioners. People living in more rural areas remain isolated as damaged roadways mean supplies can’t be delivered.

“A lot of people have lost everything, their families, their houses and their businesses,” says Gomez Jimenez. “We just want to help in any way we can. There’s a big humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico.”

Dr. David Logue, a psychology professor who taught at the Universidad de Puerto Rico for a few years before coming to the U of L, had been thinking about doing a fundraiser. He, along with Karen Pinto-Larsen, a U of L student, contacted Gomez Jimenez about joining forces. They have

been further reinforced by many other campus groups, including the Spanish Club, the African Caribbean Student Association, the Neuroscience Club, the International Students Association, the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, the Delta Eta Iota and Kappa Beta Gamma sororities and the Kappa Sigma fraternity. Thus, the Students United for Puerto Rico (SUPR) group was formed.

Donation tables will be set up this week in Markin Hall and the Students' Union building from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Donations, however big or small, are most appreciated. Thanks to Lethbridge artist April Matisz, donors will receive greeting cards featuring Puerto Rico beach scenes. All proceeds will go to [P.E.C.E.S.](#), an organization that fosters social, economic and educational development of people and communities in social disadvantage in Puerto Rico.

"Despite everything Hurricane Maria took from us, we will rise up from this as a community," says Gomez Jimenez. "I could also see determination in people's faces. They're still looking forward to the future, knowing things will get better. They still need all the help they can get and I hope this fundraiser will demonstrate that they're not alone and that we're thinking of them."

Anyone wanting further information can contact [david.logue@uleth.ca](mailto:david.logue@uleth.ca) or [karen.pintolarsen@uleth.ca](mailto:karen.pintolarsen@uleth.ca).

This news release can be found online: [Students United for Puerto Rico](#).

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