

Livonia teens on mission to Peru

By HOLLY BOWNE
FREE PRESS SPECIAL WRITER

When people ask Beth Brown and Diana Friend how they're planning to spend summer vacation, their answers may be a bit surprising.

While many of their friends will be doing a little poolside lounging, or working at summer jobs, Brown and Friend will be joining about 500 teens from around the world and traveling to Lima, Peru.

The two Churchill High School sophomores, both 16 and from Livonia, will be attending Brio magazine's 2008 mission trip from June 30 to July 13.

Brio, a publication of international Christian organization Focus on the Family, has been sponsoring mission trips for teens since 1996. Students have been taken to several countries, including Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama.

Beth and Diana individually made decisions to go, unbeknownst to each other, after reading an article in Brio that featured personal stories from participants of the 2007 mission trip.

Both girls attend Memorial Church of Christ in Livonia, and during a youth group event in the fall of 2007 they discovered each had read the same article, with the same reaction.

"I said to Diana, 'I want to go to Peru,' and she said, 'I was going to say the same thing to you!' We told each other on the same day," Beth said.

The girls completed a 19-



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Beth Brown, left, and Diana Friend of Churchill High School.

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BETH BROWN about her mission application to Brio magazine

page application form.

"The hardest part was probably the question about why do you think you deserve to go," Beth said. "I had to think about what was drawing me to go. I just said I wanted to help people and I wanted to let people know the happiness I've gotten from knowing God."

Each girl was thrilled to finally receive a letter of acceptance, but then the hard work began. Each had to raise money to cover the cost of the trip, \$2,198, plus airfare and other miscellaneous expenses. The girls raised funds by doing bottle drives and sending out donation request letters to people they knew.

"I was kind of worried I

nathy, the girls are in for a life-altering experience. The teens "get really affected," she said. "They see these kids with literally nothing, living in cardboard shacks, thrilled with just balloons to play with, or bubbles."

The trip starts in Ft. Lauderdale, where the group will receive training, and learn their roles in an evangelistic drama they will be presenting called "Spellbound: Toymaker and Son."

Once the students arrive in Peru, their days will be rotations of drama ministry performed in public schools — this is allowed in Peru — neighborhoods, parks and open-air markets. They will then volunteer in orphanages and slum areas, completing whatever work needs to be done, including washing children's hair.

"This is a big deal because they have never had their hair washed" (with shampoo) before," said Diana. "They have a little water, but don't have enough money for shampoo."

The girls hope to have a positive impact on the people they encounter in Peru, and they expect to grow personally as well.

"I hope to come back closer to God," said Beth. "This will help me step out of my comfort zone. If you never get out of your comfort zone, you will never grow."

"I have never been on an airplane; I have never been overseas. It is a lot of firsts. It is exciting and scary. But it takes a little of the scariness out since I know someone who is going to be there."

wasn't going to raise the money in time," said Diana. "If you didn't turn it in by a certain time, they could drop you. But I was so blessed to have family and friends in the community who gave me bottles and donations."

The teens will be accompanied to Peru by many adults, including team leaders, and Focus on the Family staff. The entire group will be broken up into smaller teams of about 30-38 people.

Jenny and Kerry Abernathy of Amarillo, Texas, will be team leaders accompanying Friend's group. They have participated in the Brio mission trip for the past nine years.

According to Jenny Aber-