

# Another brick in Nepal

## *VICA Member helps rebuild brick by brick*

By Tammy Schuster

**F**lipping through a newspaper in a coffee shop near his office, Rob Tournour came across a two-page photo spread that stopped him in his tracks. “The picture just grabbed me,” he says. “I brought it back to the office and put it on a bulletin board.” The photo, which still hangs in his office to this day, was taken in Kathmandu, Nepal one day after a 7.8 magnitude earthquake hit the area, killing 9,000 people. Each day he looked at the newspaper photo depicting the devastation, he didn’t know why until a second earthquake shook the same region just two weeks later.

“When the second earthquake hit the country, I approached a good friend of mine who had been to Nepal before,” says Tournour. “Over coffee I told him I wanted to somehow help with rebuilding and asked if he was interested. He was exuberantly interested.”

That was in 2015, and today Tournour’s not-for-profit Another Brick in Nepal is nearing completion of its first elementary school rebuild in a remote region of Nepal.

“I’m in the brick-laying business and the overwhelming devastation, the photo, and making the connection with my friend got things rolling.”

Tournour, co-owner of Rob Tournour Masonry in Victoria, has been a brick layer for over 30 years and figures it was the photo of the crumbled brick buildings that caught his eye. He took his first trip to Nepal in October 2015 to tour some of the remote areas hit the hardest. The earthquakes destroyed over 900,000 homes, 5,000 schools, and levelled entire villages from Kathmandu to Mt. Everest and beyond.

Today, just returning from his fifth trip to Nepal, Tournour says very little of the committed international aid has reached the ground and the remote regions have



not received much help at all. He says many people are still living under re-piled rubble from their homes, corrugated tin, and tarps and says the rebuilding process is very slow, usually one home at a time.

Tournour ended up in the remote village of Aapchaur in the district of Nuwakot, a four-hour drive from Kathmandu, where the earthquakes destroyed an elementary school that housed approximately 90 students. Some of these students would walk for an hour to get to and from school. Since the earthquake two-and-a-half years ago, the school was just a temporary structure made of woven bamboo mats for walls and a tin roof, and the students' washroom facility has been completely destroyed.

Now, weeks away from completion, the new Bandevi Primary School, a 950-square-foot, three-classroom school — plus a new fully-functioning washroom

— will house school children from Kindergarten to grade 6.

And the team from Another Brick in the Nepal constructed the school to ensure it withstands any natural disaster. The footings and foundation are made of stone, reinforced with rebar and concrete, and topped with a full concrete ring-beam. Walls have been constructed with inter-locking concrete-hybrid bricks and reinforced with 1/2" rebar. Cast-in-place concrete lintels run completely around the building below and above window levels, as well as at the top of the wall. Steel-tube trusses with corrugated metal roofing and drop ceilings were installed in the classrooms.

The budget to complete the school is \$45,000 including building materials and furnishings for students. Tournour says he began his appeal to the local construction community in April 2017 and to date —

less than a year later — has raised \$35,000.

"So much support has been received from the construction industry here in Victoria," he says. "We have all worked together through the ups and downs in Victoria and I'm so inspired that they are showing their support and helping children on the other side of the world. It's overwhelming to have the support and love of the people around me."

Tournour is unable to complete his sentence when he talks about the feeling he gets when he walks into the village of Aapchaur. "It's indescribable," he says. "The reception is overwhelming."

Another Brick in Nepal is currently scouting the location for their next school rebuild with the goal of beginning construction in mid-2018.

*To learn more about the organization or to donate, please visit [anotherbrickinnepal.com](http://anotherbrickinnepal.com).* ■

