

# **Pineapple plantation in Costa Rica becomes missions base**

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CORSICANA—The world's largest organic pineapple farm became a Texas Baptist church's missions base in Costa Rica, thanks to a Corsicana layman.

Soon after Danny Reeves arrived as pastor of First Baptist Church in Corsicana six years ago, he presented his missions vision to the congregation.

"Brother Danny is a big believer in being an Acts 1:8 church," said Bob McNutt, referring to the New Testament verse that says: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

In the case of First Baptist Church, Reeves explained, that means missions activity in Corsicana, around Texas, elsewhere in the United States and globally.



At its peak, the 3,000-acre pineapple plantation Collin Street Bakery operated in Costa Rica produced 30 million pineapples a year. McNutt, president and chief executive officer of Collin Street Bakery, told Reeves his family business owned a pineapple plantation in Costa Rica, and First Baptist was welcome to use it as a base of operations for missions in Costa Rica.

### **Pineapple plantation as missions base**

Collin Street Bakery initially secured 365 acres in Costa Rica to start its own pineapple plantation after suppliers of the high-sugar-content pineapples the bakery uses in its famous fruitcakes raised prices 50 percent over four years. In time, the plantation grew to 3,000 acres, and at its peak, the organic farm produced 30 million pineapples a year.

McNutt offered accommodations in the plantation's lodge, capable of

housing up to 18 people, and he agreed to provide meals for the church's mission team and arrange their ground transportation.

### **Use resources for kingdom purposes**

McNutt's willingness to make available his company's resources for missions has inspired other members at First Baptist, Reeves noted.

"It's extremely exciting to see God open doors as he has used local people who take what they own and use it for the purposes of the kingdom," he said. "It's been mentally and spiritually engaging, as they ask, 'What do I have that can be used by God?'"

Thomas McNutt, the company president's nephew, agreed.



Bob McNutt, president and chief executive officer of Collin Street Bakery, told Pastor Danny Reeves his family business owned a pineapple plantation in Costa Rica, and First Baptist Church in Corsicana was welcome to use it as a base of operations for missions in Costa Rica. "This was all Bob's vision," he said. "He has an entrepreneurial mind, and he said: 'The infrastructure is there. Here is how it can be used for the gospel.'"

## An eye-opening experience

The 26-year-old Texas A&M University graduate, who is a vice president in the family business, traveled to Costa Rica as part of the mission team from First Baptist Church a couple of years ago.

Team members spoke in school assemblies, led skits and crafts activities for children, and went door-to-door inviting people to attend evangelistic services at local churches, he recalled. The commitment of the Christians in those churches left a deep impression on him.

“So many times, we value the wrong things—material things and accomplishments in the eyes of the world,” he said. “In Costa Rica, I got to be with some incredibly accomplished people—not because they are materially successful but because they have a heart for God.”

## **Attract attention, draw crowds**

Another nephew, Will McNutt—who jokingly identifies his role at Collin Street Bakery as “general counsel, chief paper pusher and vice president of nepotism”—coordinated logistics for a 2015 mission trip to Costa Rica.

When teams from Texas travel to Costa Rica, it helps local Christians gain a hearing, he noted.

“Every year when the Americans come to town, it attracts attention, and the pastor of the local church uses that attention as a ministry tool,” he explained.

Costa Ricans are eager to talk with people from the United States, and they are receptive when the Americans invite them to evangelistic church services, he noted.

## **‘Beachhead for missions’**

The “beachhead for missions” God provided at Collin Street Bakery’s pineapple plantation enabled First Baptist to make local contacts and establish relationships in the country, and the missions partnership continues to inspire involvement by members, said Reeves, president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

“Every single time we have gone, new people have joined us,” he said.

The pineapple plantation grew so successful, Collin Street Bakery eventually used only about 10 percent of the pineapples grown there and sold the rest. So, the bakery sold the farm with one provision—First Baptist Church would continue to have access to the facility. Since the sale of the property, the church group stayed at the plantation’s lodge once and used a hotel on another occasion.

### **Work behind the scenes**

Recently, the bakery purchased a comparatively small plot of land near the original plantation to start another pineapple farm. And the long-range plan includes building a lodge on the property so the Corsicana church group will have its own missions base, Will McNutt noted.

Although Bob McNutt has journeyed to Costa Rica in advance of the mission teams to work out details, and he has encouraged his nephews’ involvement, he hasn’t personally participated in a mission trip. Instead, he prefers to work behind the scenes, handling logistics for the endeavor, he insisted.

“I don’t know that I’d be particularly good at knocking on doors,” he said. “I recognize my own strengths and weaknesses. I’m just happy to have been helpful.”