

NEW MIDDLE SCHOOL OPENS AT SEMUY

Most TEACH sponsored students attend primary school in grades one through six or live at TEACH supported residence centers while at secondary school far from home. However, we have known that many village children who complete the elementary grades lack any opportunities to continue their education. They cannot leave their villages and live away from their families to attend a basico school. Thus TEACH is venturing to help establish and support schools at the Basico or middle school level, grades seven through nine, near where the children live. In January of this year our newest project, a midlevel school, was opened in Semuy, a village high in the mountains some twenty miles from the town of El Estor.



Ribbon cutting ceremony for the Semuy Basico School.

A delegation of eleven friends of TEACH visited Semuy in March 2008 for the formal opening of the Semuy Basico school which will serve students from several surrounding villages. More than three hundred Mayan villagers met us on the morning of March 5th for prayers of thanksgiving and the blessing of the school where fifty-two students were already attending class.

Last October, upon receiving the promise that classes would start in January, the villagers had begun to build the new school building



Over 300 Mayan villagers gather to celebrate the opening of the new middle school in Semuy.

and make desks. As an opening day gift, the school was presented with a blackboard. The cutting of the ribbon, a length of bright blue crape paper, allowed everyone to enter the school to hear speeches of gratitude by the village mayor and many grateful parents.

To attend a Maya community celebration is to witness democracy in action at its most fundamental level. Any and all in attendance are invited and encouraged to speak. Although in the not too distant past only the male members may have risen to the occasion, today the women are just as likely to find their voice.

This is the first opportunity for students in the Semuy area to continue their schooling beyond the primary level. Until now the nearest midlevel school was nearly ten miles away in the village of Chichipati. To reach it any Semuy students would have had to go on foot.



Smiles from some of the students enrolled in the new school.

TEACH has promised to provide a teacher and teaching materials for this first year. Our expectation is that with each subsequent year TEACH will find the finances to hire additional teachers as we continue to solicit donations. We are confident it can be done. We ask you to pray for the success of TEACH financial campaigns and help us find other generous



Now these children have the opportunity to continue their education near their homes.

friends who, like you, will help open doors to education for Mayan children.

NEW BRIDGE REUNITES COMMUNITY AND TOWN *By David Megel*

Over three years ago TEACH opened a school in the village of El Quetzal. It was then and remains the school farthest from the town of El Estor, where TEACH began its first project. The hike to El Quetzal is beyond the endurance of most casual visitors. I can personally attest that, for a “70 year old not-in-too-bad-shape” person, the hike up the mountain will increase your metabolism. It may also decrease your enthusiasm for repeating the exercise.

Our recent trek to El Quetzal took the greater part of a day, starting at seven in the morning and arriving after two o'clock that afternoon. Our troop had intended to return to its El Estor hotel the same day, but the setting sun and exhaustion both contributed to our decision to accept the hospitality of our hosts and remain through the night, asleep in swaying hammocks, before returning to town the following morning.



About two years ago during one of Guatemala's worst storms, a tree fell directly upon one of the four suspension bridges that link El Quetzal and five other villages to the town of El Estor. The bridge spanned a sixty-foot wide expanse over a river twenty feet below. The storm isolated the villagers during the rainy season since at times the river rises to impossible levels. During the best of times, descending to the river, wading across and scaling the opposite bank was more than even the most hardy would attempt.

Although the mission of TEACH is directed toward providing schooling for Maya children, friends of TEACH have provided medicine to the community and engaged in certain building projects. Brian Olp, the son of Tom Olp, a member of the TEACH Board of Directors, is an engineer and a member of “Engineers Without Borders,” a humanitarian organization that responds to needs in developing countries wherever those may be. Having visited Guatemala on two previous occasions, Brian discovered El Quetzal's need for a new bridge and convinced thirteen Chicago area engineers that Guatemala was calling. He

also arranged with the Mayan community to have thirty El Quetzal villagers join in the work.

On a Saturday morning at 6:00 AM the engineers started on the path toward El Quetzal carrying cable, hand tools and a generator for an electric hammer drill. They were greeted by the thirty men from the village who had in the four weeks prior hauled up some 2,000 pounds of concrete mix and a quantity of lumber sufficient for the bridge surface.

Eleven days later I arrived - carried half of the way to the bridge site by motorcycle and then struggling the other half on foot - to see the completed bridge. The thirty Maya and engineers (ten men and three women including a 65 year old woman) had worked from sun up to dark, camping on the side of the mountain under a plastic canopy, and had completed the bridge in ten days. They had drawn sand from the riverbanks and carried more than 2,000 rocks up from the riverbed to construct footings.

The structure is magnificent. The pride and prayers of the engineers and their Mayan brothers and sisters now blessed the bridge, already consecrated by the sweat of the workers. To my mind it is the 8th wonder of the world!

For more information about Engineers Without Borders go to www.ewb-usa.org.

A BOAT NAMED SUNDAY *By Shari Zamarra*

Negotiating the challenge of culture and language always makes our TEACH trips interesting. During our March 2008 trip we were blessed with two excellent translators – Meghan Miller and Elaine Lydick – who made so many things easy. However, at one point in Puerto Barrios we



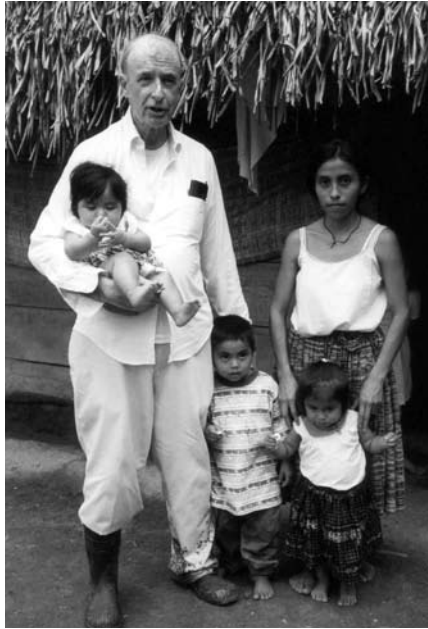
were stymied. We needed to travel by boat from Puerto Barrios to Livingston on Saturday, and the Livingston hotel had promised to send a boat for us at 2:00 pm.

We arrived at the dock around 1:00 pm and, as is usual, were immediately besieged by boatmen wanting our business. One was particularly persistent, but we didn't think he had been sent from the hotel because the conversation kept coming around to 1:00 pm and Sunday. We argued that this day was Saturday. While we all waited in a very hot van, another phone call was made to the hotel. And we finally understood that what he had been trying to communicate for some time was “The name of the boat is Sunday!”

EDUCATION WAS HIS MISSION IN GUATEMALA

In the 1980s, while he was serving at St. Mary of Sorrows parish in Fairfax, Virginia, Claretian Father Thomas Moran encouraged parishioners to journey to Guatemala to visit their sister parish in El Estor and these journeys continued over many years. Father Moran has retired from mission work, but members of a group that accompanied him on a 2001 trip were inspired to do something to advance his dream of education for all Q'eqchi' Mayan children in Guatemala.

For almost 30 years, Father Tom Moran, C.M.F. dedicated much of his Claretian missionary effort in Guatemala to the education of Q'eqchi' Indian children. He was instrumental in founding the first head-start school for Indian youngsters living in and around San Pedro parish in El Estor in 1972. Until his retirement from missionary duties in Guatemala, he always placed great emphasis on education for children in the Central American country.



In the early days, he struggled to get the first school started, so the children who spoke only Q'eqchi' could learn Spanish, the national language of Guatemala. "These children," he said, "are virtual outcasts in their own country. They know nothing of their own heritage. They cannot read. They cannot write."

From that modest beginning, Moran led the charge for more schools and teachers in the Izabal diocese. His efforts paid off as new schools were established, including three high schools in El Estor, Livingston, and Rio Dulce. Moran kept up the work of educating indigenous children at this Claretian mission site throughout the worst years of Guatemala's long and brutal civil war—a time when even such apparently nonpolitical efforts might be viewed as a radical challenge to the status quo.

In appreciation of his pioneering work in education, a new secondary school facility—the Father Tom Moran Education Center—on the Rio Dulce River, has been named after him. "When I first heard they named a school after me," Moran says, "I was overwhelmed. They usually name something like that for you after you're dead," he adds with a mischievous grin.

The center, operating under the Ak'Tenamit Association, occupies 900 feet along the riverfront. Located on its 140 acres, mostly rain forest, are not only classrooms but also workshops, a library and computer lab, dormitories for

resident students, a meeting hall, dining hall and kitchen, bathrooms and showers, staff quarters and more. The school is accessible for children from mountainside villages because they can come by canoe, cutting their travel time in half.

The center offers courses in sustainable agriculture, infrastructure construction involving latrines and potable water systems, and health education and rural development in addition to a regular core curriculum. "Students study in a formal classroom setting for three weeks of each month," Moran says, "and then conduct field work for one week to practice what they learn in the classroom."

"Guatemala's population includes approximately 700,000 Q'eqchi-speaking Indians. By learning Spanish and English and acquiring vocational skills, the students will be qualified for employment opportunities in the villages, thus breaking the chain of poverty of their parents and grandparents." Capacity of the center will be 400 students at the junior high school level, 200 of whom will board there.

DUKE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS RAISE THE ROOF

Pupils at Los Pollitos pre-school in El Estor were getting wet. The school roof was leaking. Something had to be done. So 13 students from Duke University Catholic Center used their spring vacation to travel to Guatemala, tear down the old roof and build a new one. Directed in their labor by Tom Olp of Chicago, along with Ingrid Perez and Olger Pop of El Estor, "The Duke Construction Company" started every morning at sun-up. But to finish in the time allotted, they worked late into the evening by floodlight. The old roof came off the first day. The new roof was up four days later and Los Pollitos - "The Little Chicks" - were back learning to read and write without having to dodge raindrops.

Repairing a school roof is not something in which **TEACH** regularly engages; **TEACH** funds are used to hire teachers and provide school and teaching supplies. But when Tom Olp, his son Brian, and the other members of his family of eight see a need they seem to find ways to recruit workers and find the resources to respond. This was the case on two occasions this spring in Guatemala. Brian with the help of 12 men and one woman from "Engineers Without Borders" built a bridge on the trail up the mountain to the village of El Quetzal (see the bridge story elsewhere in this issue). Brian's father then inspired the Duke University students to repair the Los Pollitos school roof.

Back on campus, the Duke students asked themselves "Now that the roof is completed what can we do next year?" We certainly have some repairs needing their expertise. The friends of **TEACH** say, "Thank you so very much for your energy, your zeal, and your strong backs and legs! If you are willing to return, we are ready to put you to work."

A SUITCASE OF SURPRISES

By Shari Zamarra

When we travel to Guatemala with TEACH, we experience many things that are very different from our everyday lives in the US. We also realize what is universal. On our most recent trip the most obvious common ground was the power of play. Claudia and Mark Brown, who traveled with us, had a suitcase of surprises. No matter where we went,



in less than 5 minutes Claudia and Mark were playing with the children. Claudia speaks a little Spanish, but language was almost a non-issue. "Crazy Eights" in Spanish and a dice game called "LCB" brought squeals of delight. Games with soccer balls, footballs, beach balls and basketballs delighted kids of all ages. Mark kept a pump handy so balls were inflated at a moment's notice. I have never seen such a variety of games that could be done with a tennis ball. In Lagunita the classic "Duck, Duck, Goose" game had a circle of at least thirty adults and children. The gift of play was a beautiful thing to behold. Watching Claudia and Mark brought a smile to my face and sometimes tears. God surely blessed us with their presence.

The vision of TEACH is to help empower Mayan communities to achieve greater social and economic self-sufficiency through opportunities for education while respecting their cultural norms.

Yes, I would like to be a TEACH Sponsor

Please Ask a Friend To Be a Sponsor of TEACH. \$30 a Month (\$360 a Year) Will Keep a Child in School.

I'll sponsor:

- Boy Girl in primary grades
- Boy Girl in middle school
- The Semuy Basico Middle School

I have enclosed a check in the amount of \$ _____.

I cannot be a sponsor now, but I am enclosing a donation of \$ _____.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone(H) _____ (Other) _____

E-mail Address _____

MY JOURNEY *By Elaine Lydick*

My experience in Guatemala was incredible. We traveled



around the country for 10 days, visiting schools and sightseeing. I spent most of my time translating for the group. It was a lot of work, but I enjoyed fostering the communication between TEACH and the Guatemalan people. My

favorite part of the trip was playing with and talking to the children. At one school (Semuy), the students only spoke in Q'eqchi! We were unable to speak to one another, but communicated through body language. My least favorite part was the tortillas because we ate them at every meal. (I have not eaten one since.) I have fallen in love with the people of Guatemala and hope to go back again one day.

DID YOU KNOW???

- TEACH has an updated website. Check it out at www.teacham.org.
- One of the favorite drinks in Guatemala is called a "Licuado." It is a delicious cooling drink made with fresh pineapple, strawberries, melon, mango, watermelon, or banana. You can order it with milk, my favorite, or with water, in large or small servings. Give yourself a treat. Order the large with lots of crushed ice.
- In most Spanish speaking countries the young women are called muchachas. And the young men are called muchachos. But in Guatemala the common term for young women is embras. The young men are called baronies. If you would like to learn a bit more Spanish, Internet search "Babel Fish" (babelfish.altavista.com), an automatic translator.

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