



The Aldea (village)

Spring/Summer 2019

Issue No. 29

Empowering Guatemalan children through education.

NEW SCHOOL DEDICATED AT DOS ZAPOTILLOS LAST FEBRUARY

By Fred Walker

We could hear the voices of happy children and the music of marimbas as our **TEACH** contingent made its way up the steep path to the village of Dos Zapotillos, one of our **TEACH**-sponsored schools in eastern Guatemala. Excitement was in the air as we proceeded to the formal dedication of the village's new classroom.

When we first visited this village three years ago, we were driven there by Padre Abel, a Central American Claretian priest in the parish of San Antonio de Padua. We met with the village council under a thatched roof, supported by bamboo poles, on a dirt floor. This was the classroom that the village primary school children called their own. During the meeting, the council's spokesman asked if **TEACH** could provide financial support to build a new classroom. We told them that we required a detailed written cost proposal and that we would consider their request at our next Board of Directors meeting.

When we received the cost proposal, a motion was approved unanimously by our Board. Construction commenced shortly thereafter. **TEACH** received funding of just under \$10,000 over two consecutive years from St. Mary of Sorrows Catholic Church in Fairfax, Va., which covered the construction costs.

One of the stipulations of our agreement with Dos Zapotillos is that the manual labor be provided by the village. Thus four men volunteered each day until the project was completed. In this manner, the village "bought into" the project and could claim a true partnership with **TEACH**.

During our visit to the rural site in February 2018, the concrete floor had been poured and the walls of the concrete-block classroom were going up. All the materials had to be hand-carried, up a steep path from a dirt road to the village. The school was completed in



Villagers gather at the school. Teacher Victor Hugo wears a plaid shirt. Padre Abel is on the right.

late 2018, and the dedication coincided with our **TEACH** visit in February 2019.

When we arrived at the village everyone was in a festive mood, with the children especially eager to try out their new school. The pastor, Padre Carlos, had drawn up the plans for the building. The finished product was well-designed, attractive inside and out, and built to weather the elements. Padre Abel blessed the site as incense was dispensed, in keeping with the Maya tradition. We then entered the village chapel where Padre Abel said Mass in the local Q'eq'chi language, to the delight of the local populace.

After Mass and brief remarks from the village council president and the teacher, the ceremonial ribbon-cutting ceremony was conducted. **TEACH** Chairman Shari Zamarra did the honors, and we all entered the school. Speeches were made, and then we were treated to a traditional meal of spicy chicken soup, accompanied by tortillas and the ever-present marimba music.

The pride in the eyes of the villagers who helped build the school, and the excitement of the young students conveyed a message of gratitude for another small step in bettering their community, through a self-help project and the opportunities that education will afford them.

AN ORDINARY TEAM VISIT SHIFTS GEARS AND LANDS ‘ON THE AIR’

By Ken Santucci

This is a story of how the **TEACH** team wound up in a live radio broadcast in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala last February.

It’s late on a Saturday afternoon, and we are relaxing at Bishop Domingo Buezo’s house, enjoying his always-generous hospitality, which includes shish kebabs and some local refreshments. He asks Shari to say grace and, as always, she asks Jeff to translate. The bishop interrupts: “No need! God understands.”

During our pleasant meal, the conversation turns to the Bishop’s radio show. I ask if it would be possible to see the radio facilities. Before we know it, we are piled into his pick-up truck, and the bishop is in the driver’s seat. I ride in the open rear cargo area with Jeff, our translator and Fred, **TEACH**’s treasurer. We are riding through a rough town at a decent clip, and it is getting dark. I see lots of people about, lots of businesses, and several store fronts. Then the thought occurs to me “I know nobody; I can’t speak to anybody.” As we continue barreling along, I think, “What if I fall off? How could I find my way back?” I really don’t know where we are going, but then I remember that Fred is always there for us, so everything will be fine.

We wind up at a gated facility. It feels like I’m in a “Mission Impossible” movie, and we are getting ready to deploy for an assault. We get out of the truck and are greeted warmly as we enter the building; we have arrived at the radio station. The staff make us feel welcome and give us a tour. Bishop Buezo (also Director General of Radio Veritas, Izabal, Guatemala) is known as Monsignor at the station. Our tour ends in a room with a long table and three microphones, facing a large window with a view into a broadcast center. Cesar Hernandez, the host, is broadcasting live with energetic music.

Shari, directed to sit in front of the center microphone, is acknowledged by the host with a friendly nod. We are told that Shari will be interviewed on air, an unexpected surprise. She settles into her place with Jeff at her side, ready to translate. The rest of the team quietly becomes the audience, and I start my video camera to record this historic event. The first in-country radio message about the **TEACH** education program is on live, with no rehearsal. Being asked to do a live broadcast at the spur of the moment can be nerve wracking, but



*Bishop Domingo Buezo, foreground, interviews **TEACH** Chairman Shari Zamarra, at top, center.*

Shari does a great job answering the questions, and Jeff deftly translates the answers.

Soon the broadcast is finished, and we hustle back to the truck. Hustling out of there! Hustling fast! Just like a Seal team mission, and we must exit fast and swift! We are late in getting to the cathedral to celebrate Mass. We rush back through dark streets, disembark, and get Bishop Buezo where he needs to be. He asks us to speak at the end of Mass; many attendees thank us later for the work that **TEACH** does. Our regular van driver, Jose, gives us a relaxed, much-welcomed, ride back to the hotel.

Just another spontaneous adventure with Team **TEACH**! Stay tuned for more **TEACH** adventures in Guatemala. ... Signing off, Ken Santucci.

Ken Santucci teaches video and digital technologies at the college level.

DID YOU KNOW?

You can make a one-time donation to **TEACH**, to honor a loved one’s passing or to celebrate a special occasion. Some recent examples include memorial donations to honor the lives of Ms. Joan Hickey and Ms. Dolores Cordes. (Both women were longtime employees of St. Mary of Sorrows Catholic Church, in Fairfax, Va.) Another example is a donation from Edie and Ed Reinsel, who have been married 60 years. For more information on how to make such a donation, send an email to board@teacham.org.

CHAIR'S MESSAGE: THE POWER OF CONNECTION AND BELIEF

By Shari Zamarra

TEACH continues the journey, knowing that our belief in education for Guatemalan children makes a difference. Despite our world and national news, which can be discouraging, we know that there are points of light. The light is possible because of connections. One interesting one is BINGO, celebrated in Fairfax with a night of fun on March 23 and raising over \$4000 and a similar night in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala, where a very determined nun, Sister Aracely, supports the Asuncion orphanage with monthly games at a local restaurant. Maybe we can connect the two with the children's song B-I-N-G-O.

Another important connection is the Guatemalan Embassy in Washington. They understand our mission and offer support. On May 16, Karen Abraham and I attended an event on Capitol Hill. Fifty business people from Guatemala came for an Expo of Hope. Representatives of various industries – sugar, coffee, construction, energy, apparel and textiles – have pledged thousands of new jobs to keep Guatemalans at home. Their motto: "More Trade. More Investment. Less Migration." We wish for the success of this initiative, and hope that some of our scholarship students might find connections.

Someone else who believes in our mission is Domingo Buezo, bishop of Izabal. He appreciates how important our work is to the children of Guatemala. As a bishop in a country that, historically, is predominantly Catholic, he holds powerful influence. This power helps us maintain meaningful connections in this third-world country.

Nevertheless, Bishop Buezo is a humble, warm man who always makes time for **TEACH** visitors. During our visit with him in February, Bishop Buezo requested help for his radio station (see related article in this newsletter). To his surprise, our treasurer had ready a generous donation from **TEACH**. Radio is

OUR MISSION

The mission of **TEACH** is to actively respond to the schooling needs of underserved children in Mayan communities in Guatemala.



*Sister Aracely supports the Asuncion orphanage with monthly games at a local restaurant. **TEACH** also uses BINGO to raise funds, but for education.*

extremely important in this country; it can reach residents in remote areas, where there is no internet access, to provide culture and education. Strengthening connections is our constant effort, especially with you — our supporters. Comments and questions are always welcome. We are grateful.

DID YOU KNOW?

The 2020 **TEACH** trip to Guatemala is Jan. 30 through Feb. 12. You are welcome to come with us! Please send Shari an email, if you are interested, at shari.zamarra@gmail.com.



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This newsletter is published two times a year by **TEACH** (Toward Educating America's **CH**ildren) a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. EIN 05-0521491
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LESSONS IN CULTURE ALIVE AND WELL IN CURRICULA AT SCHOOLS

By Anne Yehl

The ribbon was cut and we were now standing in the new Dos Zapotillos school house. Posted on the wall were the weekly schedules for the various grade levels. It was no surprise seeing mathematics, Spanish, and natural science among their many subjects. But I *was* surprised to see Q'eqchi' listed as one of them. As **TEACH** supporters will know, Q'eqchi' is one of many Mayan languages in Guatemala. In my extreme naiveté, I had assumed that when it came to learning languages, the children would focus only on learning Spanish, rather than also advancing in their first language, Q'eqchi'.

I had previously visited non-**TEACH** schools that similarly educated the children of indigenous populations, but they were only ever taught the country's primary language and did not learn to read or write in their indigenous tongue. So why would this be any different? Well, why shouldn't children learn how to read and write in their first language, the language of their family and village? I had been so focused on the need to prepare the children for the world, I missed the vital importance for all children to be rooted in their culture; to know where in the world they come from.

As we continued visiting more **TEACH** schools and villages, each adult made their desire clear: They wanted to give their children every opportunity possible, and that included knowing their culture fully. After Dos Zapotillos, seeing Q'eqchi' as a school subject stopped being surprising and instead became a reminder of the wisdom of the villages and



Students in Guatemala are schooled in Maya culture.

of **TEACH**. They put a value on giving the children a place in the world, but also a place in the community.

Even if one overlooked the above, the retention of traditional Maya culture through dress would be harder to miss. In the villages practically all the women and teenage girls wore a skirt known as a corte, a long piece of fabric wrapped around the waist. Pleated cortes drying on the line became an expected sight in every village. In the larger towns, some women did wear more Western attire, but it was much more common for women to wear a beautiful corte and often pair it with a huipil, a loose-fitting traditional Maya top. As we drove west and left the Izabal Region, the cortes we saw changed from full pleated skirts held by a rope to a flat piece of fabric held by a belt. No matter the exact look, seeing so many women in cortes walking to school, to work, or running errands felt like a symbol of a thriving Maya culture going out into the world and not being diminished by it.

Anne Yehl is a sponsor for **TEACH**.

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 _____

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