



Spring Update

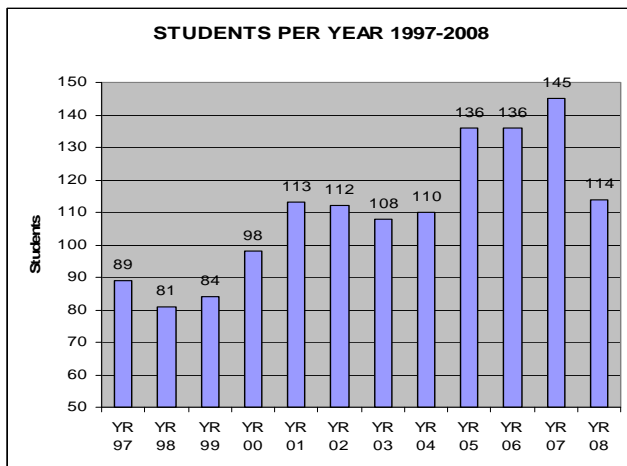
April 2008

Guatemala Friends Scholarship/Loan Program (Progresar)
Of Redwood Forest Friends Monthly Meeting and Guatemala Monthly Meeting
email: progresar@hughes.net or lacelle@conexion.com.gt website: <http://guatemalafriends.org>

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FORCED TO CUT NUMBER OF STUDENTS

By *Martha Dugan*

Our loyal supporters know that in the past decade we have worked hard to grow. The number of students we have been able to support has grown from 89 in 1997 to 143 in 2007. During that period we have worked to increase our donor base in a number of different ways. Perhaps our most successful effort has been the addition of study tours of Guatemala which we initiated in 2002. The tours have increased the visibility of our program and brought in new donors, but despite our best efforts we have not been able to raise enough money to support our growth.



In both 2006 and 2007 we took in less money than we spent. We are still in a strong financial position because we were able to spend money that Tom and Trudy Hunt (the program founders) left us in their will. Still, we could not continue at a deficit so this year we were forced to substantially cut down on the number of students we were able to support. No students were asked to leave the program, but of the 51 who graduated or left the program at the end of 2007 only 28 were replaced. This reduced our student count from 143 in 2007 to only 114 in 2008.

It was sad for us to have to turn down students that we knew would have been accepted in other years. The greatest cuts came in the number of secondary level students we were able to support. We accepted only 9 new secondary students reducing the total number from 68 in 2007 to 43 in 2008.

In addition to lowering our student count we are working to reduce our administrative costs as much as we can.

Although we have elected not to totally abandon our campaign to gather follow-up information about our graduates, we plan to greatly reduce the number of trips we will be making in 2008. We will also limit our visits with the families of our current students. Still, no matter how much we scrimp and squeeze we are limited in how much we will be able to save for two reasons. First, we have always run a very lean program. There is very little fat that can be eliminated. Second, our major administrative expense is salaries and because the inflation rate in Guatemala has been much higher than that of the U.S for the last decade, the relative cost of salaries has increased.

When all is said and done the only solution is to increase donations. In order to do this we need your help. One idea that has been very successful in other programs is to encourage donors to sponsor a specific student rather than just make a general donation. The sponsors then receive reports on their specific student's progress and can even receive letters directly from the student. Although The Guatemalan Friends Scholarship Loan Program has always had a few sponsors of this type, we have not pushed for more in the past because the cost of supporting our students is relatively high. It costs about \$1000 a year, almost \$90 a month to fully support a student who is attending the university. We know this is more than most of you can afford but it occurs to us that many of you might be willing to help us fund-raise by putting together a small group of your friends. Together you could fully support a student and receive information.

Several meetings already sponsor a specific student and we encourage other meetings to consider following suit, but in thinking about putting together a sponsorship group, there is no need to limit yourself to Quaker Meetings or even to Quakers. We have already had a few Friends put together sponsorship groups by hosting parties or meals for their friends. We could help you do this by sending you information, brochures and even a short DVD which describes our program. If the group was not able to pay the entire year's support at one time, we could accept a down payment with pledges for additional payments on a semi annual or quarterly basis.

If you don't feel that you can put together a fund raising party perhaps you would considered asking for donations to the scholarship program in lieu a gift at your next birthday or other celebration. Or maybe you would be willing to remember us in your will. We freely admit that we are not sophisticated fundraisers. Maybe you have other ideas that you could share with us. Whatever you

can or can not do, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your support.

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A CHANCE TO DONATE YOUR SKILLS?

By Martha Dugan

Several times as I fielded questions about our Study Tours of Guatemala, I have had people ask if there were opportunities for them to work. In the past I have had to say “no” since we don’t have any schools to paint or medical teams to send out to the countryside. We do, however, have a number of students who are struggling to learn English and who could benefit from a week of one-on-one intensive English instruction. What would be particularly important is the chance to actually speak and hear English from native English speakers since many of their instructors have very limited speaking ability.

Since our students come from all over the country and study in different places the only time of the year that we could gather an English study group would be during their semester break in July or during the first week in December. I have already spoken to a number of students to ask them if they would be interested in spending a week of their vacation gathering together to study English and they responded with an emphatic “Yes”. So now I am writing you to see if any of you would be interested in a “Teaching English Tour” scheduled in July or December of 2009. You do not have to make a firm commitment at this time. You just have to let me know if you think you might be interested.

Here are the broad outlines of what I have in mind. The “Teaching Tour” would last about 9 days (plus a day or two to arrive and return to the U.S). We would try to rent the same Catholic retreat center that we are currently using for our student conference. The center is located about 40 minutes from the Guatemala City airport and provides a clean, quiet, safe and attractive setting, but almost all of their accommodations are dormitory style. There are a few double rooms but probably not enough to house all the volunteers. Because their prices are lower than the cost of even a moderate hotel, our regular tour price of \$800 would be enough cover not only your costs but those of the students you would be teaching.

The “Teaching Tour” would begin on Saturday for the volunteers and the first weekend would be devoted to teaching you how to teach English as a second language. You would not be required to have any Spanish skills at all. In fact many experts recommend that language intensives be taught by persons who do not speak the native language of the learner. The students would then arrive on Sunday night or Monday morning and classes would be held all day during the week. On the follow Saturday (or one day during the week) the students and the volunteers would be taken to the colonial city of Antigua for a day of recreation.

Remember that I am talking about the summer of 2009 so it is too soon to make firm reservations. At the moment I only want to know if you think you might be interested in a service trip like this one. Contact me directly to express your interest or ask questions. (mardugan@earthlink.net) Thank you.

COMPUTERS FOR GUATEMALA

By Miguel Costop

One of our long term donors, Don Livingston, has begun a new project bringing used computers to Guatemala and distributing them in the rural areas where computers are still scarce or nonexistent. In 2007 he brought down his first container load of computers and our students were some of the first beneficiaries. Needless to say the process was not simple. Probably the most complicated step was getting the computers through customs and finding safe storage while they awaited distribution. Other complications involved faulty keyboards, incorrect electrical connections, and, of course, the need to install Spanish programs before the computers could be put to use. Progreso received 28 of the first computers. For weeks these filled a large portion of Loren’s livingroom before we were able to get them out to our students.

The students had to arrange transport for the bulky computers and monitors. They also had to arrange for the installation of Spanish programs. There were many hitches, but by now most of the computers are functioning in our students’ homes where they and their younger brothers and sisters are experiencing the joys and challenges of becoming computer literate. Pictured below is **Ana Sirin Maxia** (on the right) who came with several members of her family to pick up her new/used computer. For pictures of all of our students receiving their computers go to www.computersforguatemala.com



A SPECIAL TOUR

By *Martha Dugan*

For several years Donna Smith, an active member of the Scholarship Oversight committee in Santa Rosa, has dreamed of gathering her friends for a tour of Guatemala. This year Donna and the Progresa staff worked together to make her dream a reality. We designed a special tour for her friends and worked together to combine it with an extra week in Antigua during our famous Holy Week celebrations. The tour group was able to live in Antigua at low cost during “the most expensive week of the year” because we enrolled them in language school and arranged homestays. The accommodations were simple but the prices were rock bottom.



Tourists group at the home of current student in the department of Totonicapán

Since the entire group spent a week in Antigua on their own, we were able to skip our usual Antigua stops and use the additional time to expand on some of the other places we visited during the tour itself. We spent a total of 4 days in the Lake Atitlán area and at Donna’s request traveled to additional Indian villages and the famous Chichicastenango market. Of course we still combined our visits to tourist sites with visits to the villages and homes of current and ex-students. As usual, most of the participants rated the contact with our students and their families as the highlight of their trip.

Our positive experience with this special tour made us realize that we should offer this opportunity to the rest of our donors. Maybe you would be interested in arranging a special tour for members of your meeting or other F/friends. Of course we are interested in giving you and your group a first hand experience in getting to meet our students and learn about our program but we could be flexible about our itinerary and tour dates. We could also be flexible about the group size which could range from as many as 15 to as few as 8.

If the idea of a special tour for members of your meeting or other F/friends appeals to you, please contact us by e-mail for preliminary discussion.

MEET TWO OF OUR NEW STUDENTS

By *Miguel Costop*

Isabel Cun Sinto is a 35 year old woman from Caserío Chuacruz, Poaquil, Chimaltenango. She is the sixth of 9 children in a family where no one has studied further than the 9th grade. She is a very humble and shy woman but with lots of determination. Her parents sent her to elementary school when she was older than most of the children because she was needed at home to help her mother. When elementary school was finished the family couldn’t send her to the “básico” level (junior high school) so she had to work in the fields and at home. It was not until she was 23 years old and had saved some money by herself that she could restart school. In 1998, when she was 25 years old, she finished the basico level in a cooperative school near her village. Even though she wanted to continue studying her possibilities at home were nil. This meant that she had to leave her village in order to find work as a domestic servant in several different towns. During this time she got pregnant and become a single mother. Now, her little daughter is 6 years old and has started school. This event, according to her, made her think again about her and daughter’s future. She decided she has to study again and get a diploma as an elementary bilingual teacher.

“With this, she says, I will have more possibilities to offer my daughter the chance of education... I know it is not going to be easy because it is a long time since I went to school and maybe I will not eat sometimes but I have to do it, especially for my daughter” That determination was basically what made us accept her in the program because we know she has very good reasons to struggle with the difficulties she may face.



Juan Antonio Hernández is 19 years old and this year started a secondary teaching career at the national university of San Carlos. He comes from the remote area of the Ixcán in el Quiché, one of the places which suffered most during the civil war. He is an example of this situation since his mother was raped by the army during



the 80's and as a product of that violation he was born. Several years later his mother was married and had another child but that relationship didn't work and she was left alone with her two children. Because Juan is the only man in the house, he has always worked and studied and was able to finish secondary school only thanks to the

support of a catholic school established in another community of the Ixcán. He got a diploma as an elementary teacher but he wanted to continue at the university. His original plans were to study on the weekends and travel each week from his village to Cobán, the nearest big city. This would enable him to stay at home and keep helping his family work the land. We suggested to him that he not enroll in a weekend program and instead try to study on a daily plan because traveling every week from his extremely remote village was way more expensive than moving to the city. Finally he passed the entrance exams at the San Carlos University and moved to Guatemala City where he is now studying. Even with all the problems Juan has had in his life, we are pretty sure he will succeed because he is a very good student.

MORE STORIES FROM OUR HOME VISITS
By Meme Romero

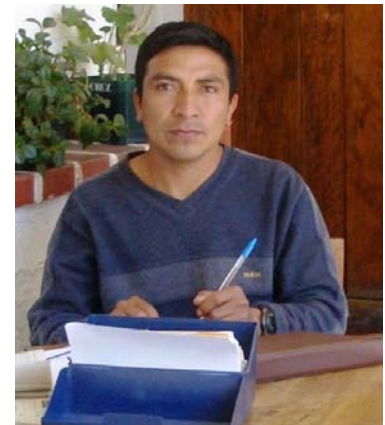


Rodrigo Chay Saquilá is a 32 year old student from Santo Tomás la Union in the department of Suchitepéquez, His community is located right at the edge of the Highlands near the Pacific coast in a humid sub-tropical area suitable for coffee plantations, citrus, and tropical fruits.

The program helped Rodrigo attend USAC, the national university. In 2005 he earned his technical degree as a Tropical Agronomist. After graduating, he joined a farming association, CODECA, (Farmer's Development and Adviser Association). At first Rodrigo worked in

administration in Guatemala City. He was promoted recently and is now a supervisor and advisor for the chile pepper and papaya projects of several communities who immigrated from the Ixil and are now located on the coast. We are not surprised by Rodrigo's success. He was always active as a student when he started several chile pepper projects in order to help with his expenses.

Benjamín Carlos García is a K'iche speaker from the department of Totonicapán in the Western Highlands. In 2005 Benjamin applied to the program seeking economic help to continue with his education. Though his home was in an urban rather than a rural setting, he qualified because of his economic need. Eight years earlier Benjamín had started at the university but was forced to quit before he completed the first year because of his economic situation. There are seven family members - a grandmother, two parents, his wife and two children . All totally depend on the low salary Benjamín receives as a substitute teacher and the \$3 a day the father can make as a day laborer.



Even though Benjamín's family is one of our very poorest, both of his parents strongly support his desire to continue his education.

Participants in our Spring 2008 Tour were moved when they visited the family home in Totonicapán. The simple adobe house, home to not only Benjamín and his parents, but also his wife, two children and grandmother, consists of one room with a dirt floor. The tour group was greeted in the outdoor patio and later invited into the house to visit with the elderly grandmother. All were impressed by this family. They live from day to day with no money left over for education but never-the-less totally support Benjamín's pursuit of a higher education. With our help, he will be able to achieve his goal and provide a better life for the family.

Many thanks to our faithful donors
 who make all this possible.
 All contributions are made to:
 Redwood Forest Friends Meeting
 and are mailed to:
 Guatemala Scholarship Program,
 PO Box 1831 Santa Rosa, CA 95402