Dear BPD Supporters,

This past August we traveled to Guatemala as BPD board members to see the work of BPD staff and community members and to meet with other organizations who are active in the Highland communities. We found that the communities and our sister non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had great respect for BPD. Mr. Reyes Patán, Director of Xilotepe, an NGO that also works in the San Martin Jilotepeque area, praised BPD for its strong partnership with communities and ability to work with local people to address needs that they identify. BPD's ability to partner with communities and deliver on its promises has resulted in a reputation that is based on relationships

rooted in trust, credibility and confidence. BPD is noted for the quality of work, a lack of bureaucracy and efficiency.

It was clear from the leaders of Cojomachal, including Don Pedro Guerra Pirir (pictured here), that many organizations have made promises that they cannot meet but by bringing our "backpack" of services to this remote community we have once again shown that BPD actually "delivers" what it promises. More than 40 communities in the San Martin Jilotepeque and Patzun regions in the department of Chimaltenango are growing stronger as a result of BPD's work. In fact, this year alone and with your support, BPD has installed 351 stoves, 425 latrines and three water systems, and constructed classrooms in four schools. Your donations are also supporting Strong Families Centers in eight rural villages.

We were impressed, not only by the work of community members and BPD staff, but also by the accomplishments of other organizations. We talked with representatives of twelve of these organizations that included agricultural cooperatives, technical education programs, government agencies, large international NGOs, small non-governmental agencies, the Peace Corps, and universities. Like BPD, these organizations are working hard in partnership with local community members to implement a range of community development programs to enhance economic sustainability, local leadership, health & nutrition, infrastructure, and education. Many of these organizations are looking forward to working in partnership with BPD to support the work of community development.

Our visit reminded us of continuing and new issues that challenge the well-being of residents of highland Guatemala. Malnutrition continues to be a huge problem. The national rate of chronic malnutrition in children under 5 remains unacceptably high at 49.3%—69.5% in the indigenous population. Unlike acute malnutrition that leads to death (for example, during periods of famine), chronic malnutrition is less visible but leads to a chain of negative developmental outcomes for individuals and a population. Overall growth and brain development are affected leading to ongoing limitations of mental abilities and health problems. Our new Strong Family Centers are so important for teaching about proper nutrition and helping those most at risk—pregnant women and young children.

Newer challenges stem from the high prices of oil in the world market, resulting in rapid and high increases for all items including food and transportation in Guatemala. This situation increases the vulnerability of residents in Highland communities. The BPD programs which focus on local sustainability will become even more vital in these remote rural areas which become more cut off from markets and vital services each time the price of oil rises.

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Santa Rosa II Welcomes New Water System

Santa Rosa II is a rural village of 53 families located about six miles from the county seat of San Martin Jilotepeque. Before the recent installation of a water system funded by the Armstrong Family Foundation, the women and children had to walk 35 minutes each way to gather water from small springs located downhill from the village. Board member, Sue Patterson, recently visited this village and here is her report.

Santa Rosa II is unbelievably beautiful in terms of its surroundings. The disparity in housing is pretty notable, as there are several surprisingly large and fancy houses, probably all of them built with the remittances that are coming into the families from a person who's gone to live and work in the U.S. (Guatemala is receiving over $10 million a day from these remittances!) The people who haven't gone of course continue to remain in their much-poorer homes, but with intact families.

Our first stop was at the impressive (and high) distribution tank where three men from the Community Development Committee met us. One of them has been selected to be in charge of maintenance of the water system. All three men seemed not only welcoming and gracious, but well-informed too—they could answer all our questions, the first of which was why is the tank so high above the ground, when most of the others we have helped get built are largely underground. The answer: there are two or three houses that are at the same altitude as the tank, so the municipal engineer realized the tank would have to be high above ground so that those homes would get water via gravity. Our hosts then took us down a pretty steep and slippery hill (there's been lots of rain here lately) to see where the catchment tank was built, as well as the house for the pump.

Within the past 10 days they'd had a terrible rainstorm with some mudslides that had torn away some of the flat area around the catchment tank, but the villagers had hauled down quite a few sandbags to shore it up. All the people used to have to descend that path to collect water, and then ascend again with that tremendous weight. None of us would be so sure-footed, I think—not to mention so strong. Also, bringing freshly washed and still wet clothes back up that hillside wouldn't be easy either.

Don Max, the man in charge, proudly turned on the diesel engine to show us how it works to fill the distribution tank so far above it, something he thinks he'll need to do about two times a week for three hours each. Of course he'll have to haul down the diesel fuel to keep it running too.

We then visited four homes, all quite poor with dirt floors and made primarily of cornstalks. At the first one, the elderly woman and her husband could barely speak Spanish, but she was delighted to have her photo taken in front of her new water tap. The thing that most touched me was that neither she nor her husband had any shoes, and before she would let us take her photo, she insisted on washing her feet with the newly-arrived water.

In contrast to many (perhaps all) of the other communities BPD has worked in, this village has a different history. Until recently, all the people were living on a large farm owned by a wealthy landowner and none of them owned any land themselves. Following the signing of the Peace Accords at the end of 1996, a fund was created (FONAPAZ) to help implement some of the terms of the Accords. The people of Santa Rosa II, after years of negotiating and pestering, were finally able to get the Guatemalan government to buy the land from the owner and distribute it among the villagers. This happened about two years ago, at which point they set aside the fairly large piece of land where the springs and water tank are located and where they also hope to build a school some day.

In addition to the new water system, all the homes have their latrines and gray water filters built and working. Within a couple of months, all of them will also have new stoves. They are elated with all the fantastic improvements in their well-being and sense of control over their lives now and are very grateful to the Armstrong Family Foundation and for playing such a key part.

Sue Patterson

Board member, Sue Patterson standing in front of this couple's newly installed water tap in Santa Rosa. Both were shoeless and the woman insisted on washing her feet before agreeing to have her photo taken. This project as well as gray water filters and latrines in the village of Cimarron were funded by the Armstrong Family Foundation.
Volunteers Provide Dental Care for Kids

The Himalayan Dental Relief Project sponsors the dental camps, and Global Humanitarian Expeditions organizes the volunteers who provide the care. They have partnered with BPD for almost two years now, bringing free dental care to children who live in rural Guatemalan villages. The kids and their parents are very grateful as dental care is unaffordable for most Guatemalans. Here is a report on their most recent visit.

The Guatemala Dental Relief Project held two dental camps in San Martin Jilotepeque in July and August 2008, in partnership with our sponsoring organization Climb for a Cause. Both camps were hosted by Behrhorst Partners for Development (BPD), our wonderful in-country partner who organized the camp location and brought in three different school populations for care.

During the course of two intense weeks of clinic, a total of 986 local students were treated with dental care with a donated value of $285,830. Camp participants included six dentists, ten dental students, four hygienists, 15 non-dental volunteers and BPD staff who provided overall support and coordination.

Our first camp took place from July 27 – August 1, 2008. Volunteers included four dentists, three hygienists and eight non-dental volunteers, allowing us to run six dental chairs for treatment. We treated 554 children with a donated value of $154,160 in dental care. The camp was a huge success due to a strong dental team with a great deal of experience and good humor, and the hard coordination work and machine support we received from BPD staff.

In 2008, we purchased a second air compressor for $1,600 with funds from Climb for a Cause. A second on-site compressor gave us much needed back up. During this clinic, we experienced several problems that took one of the compressors down for an hour or two at a time. During outages, clinic operations continued uninterrupted for the four dentists, while the two dental hygienists reverted to working without suction and polishing functions, using cavityrons to perform most of the hygiene work required.

The second camp, held August 3 – 8, marked an exciting new approach as we hosted ten dental students and two professors from the University of Colorado Dental School. The camp also included one dental hygienist, seven non-dental volunteers and BPD coordinating staff.

At this camp, the dental professors and one new graduate student performed the intake exams, diagnosing treatment plans and anesthetizing each child. Once children were numb, they received care from fourth year dental students, supervised by their professors.

The dental students were exceptionally dedicated, willing to work long hours to see all the children in line. Their joy at using their new profession to help others made the camp quite special. In six long days, Camp 2 reached 432 children with $131,670 in donated care.

In 2008 we completed work on the 250 students at the El Sauce School. We first saw this school in 2007 – the children had extensive decay and poor oral hygiene, so completing this work was labor intensive. At this point we have completed the full treatment plans for each child and re-screened every child in 2008, providing follow-up care as needed.

In 2008, we continued to treat the 289 students of the La Zumba school. At this time we have fully treated 179 students and need to see 110 students for a final visit. Oral hygiene is markedly better at this school, although decay is still prominent in the population.

Our second dental camp brought care to a new school, La Pedrera. This school is located farther from town – children were brought into clinic in the back of pickup trucks. We grew particularly fond of this school as the children arrived punctually every day, with big smiles as they returned for follow-up care. The teachers were devoted helpers who stayed in the clinic, organizing long lines and comforting kids nervous about care. At the end of the clinic, students and parents brought bouquets of flowers for each volunteer, which made for a moving conclusion to our two weeks in San Martin.

Oral hygiene is relatively poor among the school populations seen. At each clinic, students are given toothbrushes and oral hygiene instruction. We strongly recommend that these students receive follow-up instruction and education on a six-month basis. BPD has agreed to visit schools for this purpose, and we will provide educational materials such as DVDs in Spanish for this effort. Then, every two years we will re-screen each child to provide ongoing care.
Secondly, we see marked decay in the front teeth of most teenagers in these schools. This is not the case in other countries where we work, and the reason for this persistent anterior decay is not yet clear.

Anterior restorations require white composite work that is often not possible under our field conditions. Care was provided to students where decay was just beginning. For students with extensive decay, we were only able to tell the teachers that such care was beyond our reach. We need to figure out the primary source of this decay and address it in our ongoing education program.

Our clinic setup is now fully operational in Guatemala with six dental chairs available at each camp. Clinics are popular amongst our volunteers, and our January 2009 camp is fully booked.

We are delighted by our wonderful partnerships—both with Climb for a Cause which provides critical support—and with BPD who serves as our cultural liaison, working effectively to organize camp logistics and bring us closer to the communities we serve.

We feel fortunate to be a part of this important work and thank everyone involved.

Laurie Mathews  
Himalayan Dental Relief Project

Kim Troggio  
Global Humanitarian Expeditions

The winner of the 2007-08 Rotary photo contest

... is Rick Lawrence of Manchester, CT. He took this photo of a little boy from rural Guatemala enjoying a drink of water made possible by Rotarians in District 7890 – northern CT and western MA. Rick has been taking the BPD message to Rotary Clubs and has successfully raised money to fund water and related improvements including projects in Chirraminez. (See “Connecticut Rotaries”... on page 6)
Miracles in Action (MIA) collaborated with Amigos de Patzún to sponsor a pilot teacher training program. Teachers learned how to use story books to create a love of reading, working on comprehension and analytical thinking. Bill Schulte, Teacher Staff Developer in Naples (FL) is pictured here with students of La Pila school, where BPD supervised the construction of classrooms, thanks to a donation of Janusz Subczynski in 2007. If you want to learn more about this program, see MIA’s blog at http://miracles-in-action.blogspot.com/

Thanks to 17-year-old Katherine Steinman of Cincinnati, two additional classrooms and bathrooms were added to the school in Xetinamit. Katherine worked hard to raise the funds from family and friends to pay for these much-needed improvements. Other schools completed this year include one in La Joya funded by Dr. Jack Green and one in La Vega funded by John DeStefano – this will make 3 schools sponsored by John, who sadly passed away in April 2008, leaving a legacy of learning for generations to come.
We left Guatemala knowing BPD’s participatory approach to community development and BPD programs are vitally important to the future rural Guatemala. And, key partnerships are important for the strong, healthy communities. That is BPD’s vision.

Choice Humanitarian Suffers Tragic Loss

BPD is greatly saddened by the tragic airplane crash in August that killed 11 people including seven American volunteers. In addition to the Guatemalan pilot and copilot, two Guatemalan representatives of Choice Humanitarian, Walfred and Javier Rabanes, also died in the crash. Three Americans. They were on their way to El Estor to help build homes for the poor. Choice Humanitarian is a non-profit organization based in Utah. They work hard to end poverty in countries around the world, including Guatemala.

Choice Humanitarian was BPD’s very first “partner” on an infrastructure project that headed BPD off in an entirely new direction that we still maintain. They came with a group of people, including young kids, together with $5,000 to supplement a donation from another donor to help install a water project in Los Jometes. They camped in the village and the Rabanes stayed with the group the entire week, Walfred overseeing cooking for the group. The Rabanes leave behind three children.

(To learn more, go to their web site at www.choicehumanitarian.org.)

Connecticut Rotaries Step up to the Plate . . . Again!

Thanks to the efforts of Manchester, CT Rotarian Rick Lawrence, several Connecticut area Rotary Clubs, as well as his daughter’s club in Portland, OR, pooled their resources to fund several projects in the village of Chirrámínez. Their $29,000 donation will bring water to the homes of 48 families and pay for materials to construct gray water filters and vented pit latrines. Each family will also receive an Onil stove. This is the second village funded by these same Rotary Clubs. In 2007 they funded the same projects to benefit 52 families in the village of Cojornachaj.