



*Voices Today:**
History in the Making

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Barbara Yost: Reflections from 2006-2021

In 2006, I took my first Behrhorst Partners tour. It was impossible not to get “hooked” on the life-changing impacts to rural communities and the rich, vibrant Mayan culture.

After a three-year hiatus due to family issues, I took another tour with Pat Krause in October 2009. The “hook” dug deeper. This time, we visited a BPD partner village in San Martin Jilotepeque (SMJ) where the Behrhorst organization had trained a local health promoter, midwife, and pharmacy manager along with infrastructure improvements. Then we visited Choabajito Alto in northern SMJ to see their new potable water system, sanitation projects, and new Strong Family Center. (Ultimately, BPD established nine Strong Family Centers that provided nutritious meals to mothers and children under seven, as well as training in food preparation, hygiene, and weight monitoring.)

During that visit, I learned Choabajito Alto did not have a primary school. I challenged the tour group to fund half the cost of a three-room school and I would provide the remainder in memory of my Mother. The project was born! The funds were raised in three months. The school was completed with architect/engineer support from the SMJ municipality and the villagers’ “sweat-equity,” and dedicated in June 2010. Since the school was built adjacent to the Strong Family Center, there is a kitchen to support village functions. The community has since improved the school area by adding fencing, gardens, an outdoor sink, cement covering the entire front area, and a high girded steel roof which provides a covered area for sports and village gatherings. Their efforts are a sure sign of a BPD-trained community forging ahead to provide and sustain for themselves. BPD moved on from Choabajito Alto, but I visit about once/year to bring supplies and get energized. The same three teachers who began teaching at

the school in 2010 are still there. There is a dedication plaque for my Mom on an outside wall and a photo of her displayed in the teacher's room. My heart is there, the "dig" is deep!

During the first decade of the 21st century, BPD worked in conjunction with the municipal government and partner nonprofits to build schools in rural communities where schools were inaccessible or overcrowded. When BPD took on a new school project, they would submit an approval request to the national government. An approval meant the government paid the teachers and provided basic curriculum material. Some 24 school projects were completed through 2012--most funded by Miracles in Action. As with Choabajito Alto, other communities enhanced their school buildings and some have added functional computer training and internet connection--just the kind of things that should happen for long-term growth and sustainability.

The last BPD school project took place in 2012 when the Mocolit Xot Alto villagers requested our tour group's help to build three classrooms--desperately needed from overcrowding and weather damage to their initial building. They were actually conducting some classes outside. The tour group provided most of the funds; the rest were provided by the Patzún Municipality and an Ontario, Canada school group. Those classrooms were BPD's final school project. Our new strategic plan did not include a school construction component. BPD had enough on its plate to integrate the seven components designed to decrease chronic childhood malnutrition and develop sustainable practices. Helping families improve their health and achieve long-term sustainment capacity--back to Doc's cornerstone philosophy!

In early 2010, I was asked to join the BPD board. There have been many highlights of BPD's growth and change during my board time. Hiring Paco Enriquez in 2010 was key. Prior to Paco coming on board, there were BPD leadership challenges and ill feelings between the Fundacion Behrhorst and BPD. Paco took the reins immediately and made significant operational improvements. One early change stands out to me: Paco reversed the order of project implementation, putting the water systems last versus first in the program. This kept the communities desire to participate in all the projects in order to get to the ultimate potable water prize. That made a huge difference!

Pat Krause convinced Yvonne Gatz and me to lead the annual ALDEA tours, which we did through 2016 in the mini-tour during ALDEA's 50th Anniversary celebration in 2017. We recruited our successor, board member Wayne Gilbert, who in quick succession, added board member Bruce Robbins as a tour leader. They began leading our tours in 2017. They have expanded the tour program since and added more former tour participants/board members to assist. ALDEA's tour program now consists of two or more tours per year. It is important to note that tours are vital to advancing ALDEA and they are a major source of donor support and board members. Seeing a village in person before the projects, then seeing one after projects are

completed makes all the difference to get committed donors. We also take visitors on our Friday village visits during our semi-annual board meetings, and Paco routinely entertains visitors who go directly to ABPD. It's the "hook"!

When I was in the process of designating beneficiaries for my revocable trust, BPD immediately came to mind as an organization that reflects my beliefs and values. I also realized BPD did not have a Legacy Society. In May 2012, we established the Dr. Carroll Behrhorst Legacy Society to help ensure the impact of our programs will endure for generations to come. Eighteen forward-thinking supporters, motivated by BPD's vision for a better tomorrow, stepped up as founding members by including BPD in their estate plans. The Legacy Society has grown to 49 known members. Bequests to date total over \$300,000; the growth continues.

Another interesting development took place in 2014-15: a push to change the name of the organization. The emphasis for change was due to the Behrhorst name being too difficult to explain and it did not resonate with the public. After much discussion on the pros/cons, a new name, and ways to keep Doc's presence "alive," we voted to change BPD's name to ALDEA. ALDEA means "village" in Spanish, further described as Advancing Local Development through Empowerment and Action. I had to be convinced it was the right thing to do. To me, any new name still had to be explained, the Behrhorst legend was entrenched with donors, and there would be costs to make the change. We examined the change with the Behrhorst family and existing donors and found positive support from both. I was persuaded! The name change has captured people's interest within social media and public relations and helped to expand our donor base. Doc's presence is upfront in our communications.

ALDEA's 50th Anniversary Celebration in 2017 was a huge success. Many folks were involved in the planning and execution of a week full of celebration from pre-dinner gatherings to the dinner at Antigua's Hotel Porta to a mini-tour with visits to the clinic in Chimaltenango and two villages in Santa Apolonia. I went to Antigua three weeks before the celebration to assist in the preparation. The celebration was a magnificent, unforgettable event with over 150 people in attendance, including the entire ABPD staff. Nearly \$80,000 was raised—far beyond our goal to support 50 families with our 50-year celebration. It was a glorious event honoring the past, celebrating the present, and looking to the future. We dug deep; the passion was evident.

That fall, we hosted fundraising events in the States with Paco attending in Washington DC, Chicago, San Francisco, and San Diego. I was honored to host Paco and have him speak at three DC area fundraising events where we also shared the new *Visionaries* documentary entitled "It Takes a Village." This film was developed as part of a public television series hosted by Sam Waterston. It captures the essence of what ABPD and ALDEA are all about and the way we work. Bringing together the triad of rural Mayan villages, the local municipality, and ABPD to address development issues for long-term sustainment. Our integrated approach reminds me

of community development programs I worked while serving in the Peace Corps in rural Costa Rica during 1963-65. However, the Behrhorst model is far more developed and time-tested. The cornerstone of empowerment and the integrated approach of seven training and infrastructure components elevates our program to levels far beyond other similar programs. In fact, I believe our program model should be marketed and implemented globally as a shining star to common-purpose solutions for long-term success. The hook is strong, the reach is long!

For many years, BPD/ALDEA discussed forming an advisors' council. It was an idea to have former board members and engaged donors expand our fundraising capacity and provide the board with additional mission perspectives. In October, 2020, 13 people became our first Senior Advisors group. They serve as mentors for ALDEA's new Young Professionals Council members, do fundraising activities, and perform tasks from the ED/Board. An example of the latter is Senior Advisor Pat Krause tackled archiving our 60-year history. Always improving!

Fundraising is the "meat" of each board member's responsibility, but I sure didn't realize that when I began. It was never even mentioned during orientation or my early board meetings! It has taken time to grow my fundraising confidence. I took advantage of every opportunity to learn the program and connect to the mission--never missing a board or tour village visit or a chance to go to the field with the ABPD staff--nearly 40 visits total. I also attended a fundraising boot camp in 2016 which helped considerably. Along the fundraising route, I've hosted house parties, sold Guatemalan products annually at a bazaar, organized ALDEA events in DC and other places, given speeches to local groups, helped develop a new ALDEA website, funded a promotional DVD, written articles, sent tons of thank-you notes, and scrutinized my donor list and contact possibilities. I love connecting people with a cause I believe in deeply, That makes it much easier to make the "ask." My passion is fervent, the hook remains!

So goes my journey with ALDEA—the future is bright, the program is solid with the flexibility to adapt to new challenges, the leadership and staff are amazing, the board is robust and cooperative. It's a joy to work with and promote ALDEA. The dig is still deep! Adelante!