



The Guatemalan Tomorrow Fund NEWSLETTER WINTER 2018

Graduation 2018 A Success! Thanks to our Loyal Donors.

Travel Route

I know many of you that have made the journey to the school campus are familiar with the 8-10 hour drive from Guatemala City followed by a boat trip. For those of you who have not made the trip, my first experience in the region took me to the town of Livingston and Buga Mama's, the restaurant where our interns are working. After a quick lunch and hotel check-in, our boat journey continued down the beautiful Rio Dulce River to the docks of Ak' Tenamit.

After being greeted by AAT staff, a 25 minute hike takes you to the jungle campus that encompasses the cafeteria/meeting room, kitchen, wood fire cooking station, outdoor classrooms, boys' dormitory and outdoor administrative offices. Walking beyond the offices you will also be able to see the agricultural area that houses pigs, chickens, ducks; an aquaponic pond for fish breeding; and fruit and cacao trees.

Of course, the true experience is meeting and talking with the students. So proud, respectful and energized to continue and complete their education and obtain meaningful employment.

Graduation

This year, Ak' Tenamit enrolled 516 students-281 boys and 235 girls; 146 students attended 7th-9th grade and 370 students attended 10th-12th grade. In 2018, 128 students graduated; 69 boys and 59 girls. This is equivalent to a 90% graduation rate! The US cannot compete with this graduation rate and ~zero dropout statistics!

On October 26th, our founder and Chief Technical Advisor, Steve Dudenhoefer, greeted the Guatemalan Minister of Education, three vice ministers, and additional staff in Puerto Barrios and escorted everyone via boat to the Ak' Tenamit Fr. Moran Vocational High School for the graduation.

The carefully planned and beautifully decorated event included a traditional Mayan ceremony and presentations by invited guests prior to the students being awarded their diplomas. Several family members joined their sons and daughters in celebration of this very special day. What an educational journey and what an accomplishment!

After the diplomas were distributed, a special luncheon for the invited dignitaries was hosted by AAT staff at Buga Mama's. Our students were invited to pose for photos with the Minister of Education and his staff immediately following lunch. What great photos!



Guatemala City

The next day, upon returning to Guatemala City, Steve and I visited the women's shelter and the employment office complex. Students stay in both facilities for a predetermined period while employed in various businesses after graduation. The AAT

staff handles relationships with local employers and also maintains communication with the students.

We also visited Le Café's newest location where 40+ of our students are employed. They are proud, professional and happy with their new jobs. The owner of the restaurant shared that she is so pleased with the work ethic of the Ak' Tenamit interns and graduates that she prefers hiring our students at all of their restaurant locations. A true success story for our graduates. ■

A Letter from Debora Kerr

Dear Donors, Friends, Staff,

Thanks to the generosity of a loyal donor, I was able to travel to Livingston, Guatemala this October to attend Ak' Tenamit's (AAT) graduation ceremony. It was truly an experience I will never forget and I am so grateful to have had this opportunity. Please enjoy my trip notes!

Debora Kerr, MA
Executive Director
Guatemalan Tomorrow Fund



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From Village to Marriage, to University

Gregorio Mucu and Blanca Ical were among Ak' Tenamit's first high school graduates. A few years after graduating they fell in love, married in 2009, and have two bright young boys, Kanek (royal leader in Mayan) and Saqbe (white path in Mayan). Gregorio and Blanca are both Mayan spiritual guides, committed to helping reinforce the cultural identity of Ak' Tenamit's Mayan students and promoting the traditional Mayan concepts of environmental conservation, gender equity and respect for diversity. After graduation, both Gregorio and Blanca joined Ak' Tenamit's permanent professional staff.



Gregorio first served for four years as Ak' Tenamit's delegate with the National Council on Mayan Education, then as part of our teaching staff and eventually as the school's director of pedagogy. As an indigenous representative Gregorio has traveled to different countries such as Peru and France to participate in conferences related to appropriate education and environmental conservation. He has served on Ak' Tenamit's board of directors as president and legal representative and is currently studying in the university to become an environmental engineer.

Gregorio grew up in the remote mountain village of Quebrada Seca and comes from a large and very poor family. During primary school, he had to suspend his studies for several years to help his family. His sister Catalina, who at the time was in charge of Ak' Tenamit's handicraft cooperative program and a board member was tortured and brutally murdered in 2011. Gregorio proudly supports Ak' Tenamit in her memory, convinced that Education is the only way to overcome the crippling poverty that affects most of Guatemala's indigenous youth.

Blanca grew up in the jungle community of Totz'biyal where access to primary education was very sporadic. Her family expected her to finish her education when she graduated from sixth grade as that was



the highest grade offered in the area. Blanca saw it was common for girls in her community to marry as young as 14 years old, starting families at a young age and being locked into a life of poverty and powerlessness.

Promoters from Ak' Tenamit's "We Must Educate the Girls"

program visited her remote village school in the jungle several times a year throughout her six years of elementary school. They encourage her to continue her education so as to one day become a professional. Blanca had goals and dreams of becoming a leader and helping others. With support from Ak' Tenamit's girl's education promoters, Blanca was finally able to convince her father to let her accept a scholarship to study at Ak' Tenamit's Fr. Moran Vocational High School. There she studied diligently earning a junior high school degree in Rural Well Being and eventually a high school degree in Rural Well Being.



Upon graduation she joined Ak' Tenamit' staff as a woman's health promoter, traveling to Mexico and Belize to receive training. She then served for several years as a girl's counselor and is currently teaching 7th grade at our school. This school year she kept quite busy with a class of almost 90 students, using solar-powered tablets to teach students in both the native Q'eqchi' Mayan language as well as in Spanish. Blanca is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in education.

Both Blanca and Gregorio play a key role in Ak' Tenamit's leadership and in further strengthening our unique rural-appropriate vocational education model. They serve as role models for our young students and drive to ensure that we maintain our hire rate of 90% for our graduates, the highest in the country. Working in our jungle campus can be very challenging but Blanca and Gregorio serve with tremendous passion, committed to ensuring a better life for the students they proudly serve. ■

Ancestral Deer Dance Performed by Ak' Tenamit Students

Story and Photos By: Onofre Asig
Ak' Tenamit Sponsorship Program Coordinator

The Deer Dance is one of the traditions that take place every year in the last month of school at the Ak' Tenamit Fr. Moran Vocational High School. As far back as villagers can remember their ancestors have performed the Deer Dance as a ritual in order to ask for permission to the mountain being and spirit and to the lord and guardian of the mountain: the deer, before going to hunt.

The dance includes 12 hours of traditional marimba music and choreography and is composed of 23 dancers. Each one of the characters portrays a personage and has its own song and dance. The personages are the elder or the hunter and his wife; the dogs; captains and the Spanish boys; deer; monkeys; tiger and lion. This dance portrays the importance of maintaining a balance in the relationship of humankind with the animals and nature. "Ak' Tenamit lives and promotes this value with its students in order to be connected with their cultural values" (Lucas Che', Ak' Tenamit School Administrator) Increasing the student's sense of cultural identity helps them reinforce their self-esteem, thus increasing their focus on doing well in school and making productive decisions.



We encourage you to be part of the education of the less privileged Mayan young women and men. Please consider donating at: www.thegtfund.org

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Wanda Finke and the \$4,000 Mattress Madness Campaign

Wanda Finke, a loyal Guatemala Tomorrow Fund (GTF)/ Ak' Tenamit (AAT) donor, was born and raised in Mahopac, New York, a small town 50 miles north of New York City. She married Al, who worked for Pratt & Whitney in Connecticut, where they raised their six children. In 1976, Al was transferred to Florida.



While in Florida, Wanda became friends with Ak' Tenamit founder, Steve Dudenhoefer's Aunt Sally. One evening, Sally held a party when Steve was visiting from Guatemala. Wanda met his parents and brother, David. She was later fortunate to meet the third son, JJ and their sister, Lorry who lives in Maine where Wanda and Al spent their summers. Wanda admired the entire family. Interested in GTF, Wanda offered to help in any way possible. As usually is the case, help comes by way of fundraising.

When she met Sally, the Guatemala Tomorrow Fund was in the early stages of development and the family in Florida

did what it could to help Steve. Wanda was able to help as much as possible during this beginning stage. She supported Steve when he came to Florida to speak to neighbors and friends about AAT's needs: shoes, medical supplies, school supplies, clothes, bedding, and of course, money.



In Wanda's Words: What Happened Next!

One day, I had lunch with Steve's Dad, Joe, and said, "You know I've always wanted to go to Guatemala." Joe said, "You should. You'd love it!"

That evening the phone rang. It was a Chicago Rotarian inviting me to go with his Rotary work group to Guatemala. Of course, I said YES! After being there a week, I was so impressed! Over the years I had heard and read about the school but to witness the work being done and the progress those kids make being at the school and the SMILES!!! Steve is brilliant and has accomplished so much with so little. His enthusiasm and dedication is contagious and people want to help him and he puts that help to good use. His mind is always going! For others!

With my 80th birthday approaching, in lieu of gifts, I wanted to give to the beautiful children. I asked Steve for an idea. He told me the students needed mattresses. They cost \$50 each. I offered 80!

Over the years, as well as in the present, I have learned that people really want to help. Life has a way of taking their time and once invited to a project, the response is overwhelming and it seemed like I was doing them a favor by inviting them vs their donation being a favor to me.

In love, there is no giver or receiver. Both are one!

Working with GTF is like that. Steve humbly makes it possible for those of us not in mission work to do a small part to hopefully help improve other's living conditions, and we are happy to do it. A win-win! ■





In Light of the Current Migration Crisis...

Ak' Tenamit, the Guatemalan government; Guatemalan Rotary Clubs in Florida, Texas, and Guatemala; and the South Florida Jewish community have joined forces to create a program to provide accelerated education and employment training for deported migrant youth. We hope to see the first shelter-school for deported youth up and running by January.

Sponsor A Student TRANSFORM A LIFE!

Ak' Tenamit's practical, vocational education, 3,000 hours of job experience, and personal motivation prepare graduates to succeed in their rural environment, and inspire them to help their families and their communities. For just one dollar per day (\$365 per year), you can transform the life of a young person who would otherwise be trapped in poverty.

The Guatemalan Tomorrow Fund
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WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT! Donations are tax-deductible as permitted by law and processed through a PCI Compliant Data Security Company. The Guatemalan Tomorrow Fund is the US based, non-profit, non-denominational fund raising arm of Ak' Tenamit.

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