



The Guatemalan Tomorrow Fund NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2021

■ 30 years of building better futures

Dear Friends,



Steve Dudenhofer
Founder and
Chief Technical
Advisor

2021 has certainly been very challenging year for Ak' Tenamit's students and staff. With the Covid-19 vaccine roll-out being very slow in Guatemala,

and an already stressed healthcare system being pushed far beyond the breaking point, the level of Covid cases in the rural indigenous villages we serve has and continues to be very high. Guatemala's Ministry of Education mandated, for much of 2021, that our students study from home, and as most of our students come from very remote jungle communities without access to electricity or internet, it has been a monumental feat to keep them connected to their studies.

Our 800 students come from 125 rural communities and in order to make sure that they remain fully engaged with their studies, in addition to providing students with solar-charged tablets loaded with digital schoolbooks and reference materials, our teachers make regular trips to visit all of our students in their remote communities in order to support their learning. Teachers encourage them to continue their studies and meet with their parents, underlining the importance of their children continuing their education.

Our teachers (many of whom are graduates of our Father Moran vocational high school) have done an amazing job travelling on foot, by dugout canoe and by horseback to reach our student's remote villages. Upon arriving, following strict Covid-19 prevention protocols, our teacher set up temporary "field classrooms" where students can gather to receive classes and support from our teaching staff. Nationally, Ak' Tenamit is the

only organization that has succeeded in maintaining its students fully engaged in learning throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, and this fact stands as testimony to the tremendous commitment and sacrifice of the teachers and staff at our Father Moran Vocational High school.

At the beginning of September all of our 180 senior students started their final three-month internships or apprenticeships. The apprenticeships are with businesses and organizations that are interested in hiring them upon graduation. During these three months our students will have the opportunity to prove to potential employers that they can do the job well. In previous years up to half of our seniors were offered jobs before finishing their apprenticeships and over 80% hired within three months after graduation. Even with the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, we expect to see similar rates of success in our graduates securing great jobs.

It is because of your faithful support that these hard working and intelligent indigenous youth have such bright futures instead of facing early marriage and child birth, or risky irregular migration to the US. They will be leaders in their communities, help lift their families out of poverty and be examples to other youth. Over the last year Guatemala has seen a dramatic increase in child brides, malnutrition and youth migration, and we have had an unprecedented number of families asking us to enroll their children in our Father Moran vocational high school. In these difficult times, we need your support more than ever. Please continue to provide hope and opportunity for the students and their families. Together we are making a real and lasting difference in the lives of the rural indigenous students we serve in Guatemala.

Donor Spotlight-Buffalo Grove Rotary



For the last 14 years, members of the Buffalo Grove Rotary Club, based near Chicago, have made a pilgrimage to Ak' Tenamit's (AAT) jungle school to work with our students. For one week each year,

Rotary members teach our students basic carpentry skills and work with our female and male high school students to build much needed school buildings and furniture. Over the years the Rotarians and students have built classrooms, a school library, a dining hall, a technical training building, an ecolodge, bathroom buildings, docks, study halls, solar energy supports, water filtration systems and a wide range of furnishings such as bunk beds, desks and wooden lockers.



to help me with my Spanish homework while I help them with their English homework.”

Kyle says “I love to see the progress and to see the students using what we've built with them. It's great to

see how the students and local staff take such ownership of Ak' Tenamit's success and how I'm now seeing second generation students, the children of Ak' Tenamit's graduates, studying at the school.”



The visiting Rotarians have built strong bonds with Ak' Tenamit's students, staff and our AAT board of directors. They have watched hundreds of students that were very shy when they first arrived in 7th grade, graduate from

12th grade as confident and mature young women and men who are able to secure good jobs and assume leadership roles.

Stephen Legge, who has co-organized the 14 Rotary trips described this unique relationship well, saying, “Over the years we've built great friendships with the students and staff, and it has been so rewarding to watch these young Mayan girls and boys grow up to be the leaders that are now running Ak' Tenamit. We believe we are effecting change and every year we see the difference with Ak' Tenamit growing and strengthening its programs. The students graduate and become leaders, causing a multiplier effect that makes our contribution sustainable and greatly increases its impact.” Stephen visits Ak' Tenamit with his wife Jeannette, daughter Shannon and son Kyle. “We look forward to this being our yearly family trip, and instead of going on vacation to the beach we serve together as a family. This has really contributed to Shannon and Kyle developing empathy and strong service-focused values.” Shannon says “When I return to the villages Ak' Tenamit serves I see the improvements that graduates have made in their communities and how they are increasingly committed to protecting the environment. Ak' Tenamit is a very



Stephen's co-organizer and fellow Rotarian at the Buffalo Grove Rotary Club, Dan Wolf, spends his week helping students practicing their English and generally encouraging them. He says “the trips have been an integral part of his year and it has been wonderful to build such strong and lasting relationships.” Dan has brought his daughters to the school on a number of trips.

Fellow Rotarian, Don Gwinn (pictured with the birthday cake), who has made many trips with his wife Joanna, says” As Joanna and I are retired from Northwestern University where we specialized in educational administration, we are keenly aware of the barriers that indigenous people face and what a great impact we can make working with Ak' Tenamit. When I teach a student how to use a new tool, they immediately say “let me do it” and set to work building things”. Don and Joanna are in their late 70's and they always feel a great deal of satisfaction when they see the students go on to be so successful in life, avoiding early marriage or migrating to the United States. Don reminisces about arriving back at the school several years ago and having Nilson, one of the students that Joanna had taught English to running towards her excitedly calling her name. Now that Nilson has graduated and has a good job managing a restaurant, Don says that he is a fine example of the difference that can be made by believing in and supporting Ak' Tenamit's students.



“Building a green future for at-risk indigenous communities”



Hugo Tiul grew up in an impoverished Q'eqchi' Mayan family that earns their living by fishing. The family has struggled for many years with depleted fish stocks and smaller catches and felt the only way Hugo could continue his education beyond the 6th grade was to receive a full scholarship for the remainder of his

education. Hugo and his family were elated when they heard that Hugo had received a full scholarship to continue his studies at Ak' Tenamit's Fr. Moran Vocational High School.

Six years after receiving his scholarship, Hugo graduated in 2010 with a high school vocational degree in sustainable tourism, undertook 3,000 hours of internships, and soon after graduating was hired as a park guard to support indigenous communities located in and around the Rio Dulce National Park.

In contrast to national parks in countries like the US, which tend to be uninhabited other than by park rangers and their families, protected areas in Guatemala are often created on top of the rural indigenous communities that have lived in harmony with and protected the rich biodiversity for millennium. If these indigenous communities aren't fully involved in the creation and management of these protected areas, conflicts can arise and the poverty levels of the communities can increase. Hugo's job as a park guard in the Rio Dulce National Park is to function as a bridge between the rural indigenous communities and the National Council of Protected Areas, which manages the park.

The Rio Dulce National Park has tremendous potential as a tourism destination for national and international tourists interested in learning about the local indigenous culture and in visiting the pristine river and tropical rainforest. As part of his job responsibilities, Hugo assists local communities in the development of community-based tourism initiatives. This includes creating Eco lodges, small restaurants specializing in traditional indigenous fare, birdwatching tours, cave trips, kayak and paddle-board trips and woman's handicraft cooperatives. These initiatives provide a way for indigenous communities to generate income while protecting the area's pristine biodiversity. He also helps communities create nurseries where they grow fruit trees and tropical hardwood trees for reforestation programs. Hugo has helped Ak' Tenamit's students learn to graft Cacao trees which will be used to produce chocolate and he spends several weeks each year volunteering at our Fr. Moran Vocational High School campus, giving workshops to our students

on themes such as protected area management, endangered species, and environmental law.



In addition to his work as a park guard, Hugo has started several businesses which he runs with his wife Jaqueline. They have a small restaurant, handicraft shop and a tree nursery. The tree nursery is named Saqbe after their 8 year old son, who helps weed and care for the plants after school. Hugo and Jaqueline want their sons Saqbe and Kaleb who is

2-1/2 years old, to be proud of their Q'eqchi' culture and to be strongly committed to protecting the area's rich biodiversity. After they recently involved the boys in caring for a baby manatee that was left orphaned after its mother was struck by a speeding boat, Saqbe said he wants to be a park guard like his father.

Hugo continued his education after graduating from the Fr. Moran Vocational High School, and in 2019 he earned his college degree as an agronomist. He created a consulting business with several college friends and often spends his evenings and weekends surveying farms and ranches, conducting environmental impact studies and developing management plans for reforestation programs. Hugo says that studying at Ak' Tenamit's Fr. Moran Vocational High School helped him strengthen his sense of cultural identity and his sense of social responsibility, and it gave him the leadership skills he needed to be able to help reduce poverty in the area's Q'eqchi' Mayan villages, and to help protect the area's rich biodiversity. He's committed to showing his gratitude for the scholarship he received, by serving as a mentor for our students, and through volunteering for several weeks each year to give classes and workshops to students at our boarding school. The resources invested in Hugo's scholarship to study at our Fr. Moran Vocational High School will continue to generate benefits for many years. Hugo is a great example as to how investing in the future of a bright indigenous student can generate tremendous long-term benefits.



Partner Spotlight- S.H.A.R.E. Agriculture Foundation

S.H.A.R.E. Agriculture Foundation (“SHARE”), is a Canadian charity founded in 1976 by a group of farmers desiring to support - agriculture services, charity and education services in developing countries. SHARE works with local partners (usually grass roots organizations) who are capable of implementing projects with the rural poor. Their focus for each project is to provide a “hand-up”, to increase a community’s capacity to care for itself. Projects have been in agriculture (primarily in basic food security), eco stoves and clean water, adult literacy, youth skills training, anti-violence, gender equality and education. SHARE’s current projects are in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Bolivia, Haiti, and through another Canadian charity, in Cambodia.

SHARE operates with signed partner agreements, with defined expectations for project management and financial/narrative reporting. Project sites are visited annually, in addition to consulting regularly with our community-based partners to track progress.

SHARE visited the Sarstun area of Guatemala in 2010 to assess Ak’Tenamit, a residential training and education center for high school and skills training. SHARE agreed to partner with Ak’Tenamit to fund small agriculture projects that would provide practical hands on learning experiences that students could share knowledge of with the Mayan settlements and families and that would supply food for the students while they stayed in residence at the school. Projects

to date include: pigs, hens, orchards, gardens, large eco stoves for cooking tortillas, and soil improvements.

Also, in 2010, SHARE was introduced to a small grass roots organization named APROSARSTUN - www.aprosarstun.org. This small organization operates in the Sarstun area and was founded and run by young recent graduates of Ak’Tenamit school to improve the lives of their nearby impoverished Mayan communities, land settlements of families who settled in this remote area to escape the long Guatemalan civil war. SHARE’s interventions to-date have been multi-pronged to meet the many needs of families and have included: diversification of agriculture production, improved corn and bean crops, eco stoves, household water filters/community water projects, orchards, gardens, soil improvements, solar panels and latrines.

In 2018 SHARE decided to expand the SHARE scholarship program into this needy area and in 2020 with the support of the Luke Four Foundation SHARE funded scholarships for 13 students from the settlements to attend high school at the Ak’Tenamit school. Because students were learning part time at home during the pandemic, tablets were funded as well. SHARE also received funding to implement a test project of solar systems called NOWLIGHTS to recharge the tablets and provide a light for studying. SHARE attempts to support all students through all four years of their high school education.

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.

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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.

