



## Graduation - October 2024



### Dear Friends

Excitement abounds at Ak' Tenamit's jungle vocational high school campuses as graduation season has finally arrived. This year, 185 excited students will graduate with vocational high school degrees in sustainable tourism and sustainable community development. To obtain their degree, graduates complete nine months of hands-on work experience. Half of our students be gainfully employed before they graduate, and the majority will have high pay employment within the next few months.

Our students have overcome tremendous odds to have studied for the last 12 years, and graduate with vocational high school degrees. Most are the first ones in their family history to study beyond a sixth-grade elementary level. Many of our student's parents are illiterate as they did not have the opportunity to go to school. Our students graduate as young professionals with good jobs, and as a result, they are able to lift their families and communities out of poverty.

Students will be employed as park rangers, cooks, waiters and waitresses, agricultural extension agents, organic cacao production specialist, land surveyors and teachers. Many will start small businesses, and most will gradually continue their education at a university level. As our students graduate with 10 times more experience than other schools and earn double the national average for entry level jobs, they provide substantial support to their families once they graduate.

Your faithful support over the years has made this this possible, as without your help there is no way that we would be able to have almost 1,000

boarding students at our schools. When we started our school with only 12 boarding students, we never imagined that with your help we would be able to eventually have this remarkable boarding students.

We sadly announce that the Guatemalan Tomorrow Fund's Executive Director, Debora Kerr, will be retiring at the end of this year. During her seven-year tenure at the helm of the Guatemalan Tomorrow Fund, Debora has worked hard to continually strengthen administrative procedures and donor engagement. I am grateful for Debora's hard work and tremendous leadership, and she will be sorely missed. Maria Camila Medina is the Guatemalan Tomorrow Fund's incoming Executive Director, and I know she is excited to meet our amazing supporters, and to continue Debora's great work.

Frequent extreme climatic events such as hurricanes and tropical storms affecting Guatemala increase the level of risk in the villages that AK' Tenamit serves. Most homes have no electricity, running water or basic sanitation, and the access to many villages is by treacherous mountain paths that can become dangerous due to erosion. Your faithful support empowers our students to become agents of change so that they can increase the resilience of their communities and families and help break the cycle of poverty. I asked you to continue to support our efforts in Guatemala.

In Service,

**Steve Dudenhofer**

Founder/Chief Technical Advisor

## Indigenous Leadership for Environmental Protection

Guatemala's breathtaking biodiversity is under threat from a rapidly changing environment and rampant deforestation. In response, Ak' Tenamit is taking a stand, empowering rural indigenous communities to protect the country's natural treasures. Through innovative community forestry projects and the promotion of alternative income sources like ecotourism, we are not only preserving ecosystems but also enriching lives. Our graduates are stepping up as park rangers, playing a crucial role in safeguarding national forests. This commitment to conservation is vital, especially as Guatemala serves as a pivotal stop for migratory birds that help control insect populations affecting agricultural crops in the U.S. When deforestation rises in Guatemala, it sends ripples across borders; increased insect populations lead to greater reliance on agrochemicals by farmers in the U.S.



Ak' Tenamit is honored to hold the presidency of the Guatemalan chapter of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Soon, several indigenous women leaders from our organization will share our successes and best practices at the COP16 global biodiversity conference in Cali, Colombia. Their voices and experiences are powerful reminders of the impact we can make together.

## Excitement of Bounds with Graduation Approaching



On October 24th, 185 students will graduate with vocational high school degrees, marking a significant milestone in their lives. These graduates leave with nine months of hands-on experience, and many have already received promising job offers. For many, this is not just an achievement for themselves, but a groundbreaking moment for their families, as they become the first in their family history to graduate from high school. Their excitement to secure good jobs is palpable, as they look forward to contributing to their families' well-being.

Past graduates have set inspiring examples by investing their earnings into small businesses within their communities. From organic cacao orchards to poultry production projects, small shops, and corn mills, these entrepreneurial ventures have provided sustainable income for their families. Additionally, many graduates have taken the initiative to improve their family's living conditions by building or renovating homes, as well as installing solar energy systems and water filters.

## Students Take an Active Role in Protecting Their Communities



At Ak' Tenamit, our students are equipped with vital training in disaster risk reduction, a critical skill set for rural communities vulnerable to landslides, floods, and other natural disasters. Through their education, they learn to harness technology, utilizing GPS and digital mapping software to identify risk factors within their communities.

Armed with this knowledge, our students collaborate with community leaders to develop strategies that mitigate these risks and enhance the community's overall response to natural disasters. We are immensely proud of their dedication and proactive approach to ensuring the safety and well-being of their families and neighbors. By taking on these crucial roles, our students are not only protecting their communities but also becoming leaders in resilience and preparedness.

## Student Spotlight- Nolfa Tz'í Chen

Nolfa is nearing the completion of her first year in a three-year vocational high school tourism program, a remarkable achievement considering the challenges she has faced. Born with severe congenital bone deformities in her legs, Nolfa's journey has been an uphill battle. Her family never imagined that she might one day become independent and gainfully employed. In Guatemala, where access to medical care, physical therapy, and support programs for individuals with disabilities is often limited, many find themselves struggling to survive.

Despite dealing with chronic pain and the prospect of several more complex surgeries, Nolfa maintains a tremendously positive outlook and has set ambitious goals for herself. Recently, she completed a three-month internship at a restaurant in the beautiful tourist town of Antigua, where she gained invaluable experience and confidence. Excited to return for another three-month internship next year, Nolfa is eager to continue honing her technical skills and paving her path toward a brighter future. Nolfa's determination is a powerful reminder of the impact that education and opportunity can have on individuals facing adversity.



## Small Business Training Boosts Student's Entrepreneurship Skills



Students pursuing vocational degrees in sustainable tourism have recently completed an intensive training program focused on small business development and management. Thanks to the support of the Guatemala Technical Training Institute (INTECAP) and the Guatemalan Ministry of Labor, our students participated in workshops that equipped them with the knowledge needed to start their own small restaurants and coffee shops.

Through these workshops, students learned best practices in business management, fueling their hopes of becoming independent entrepreneurs. This training perfectly complements the skills they

have already gained through their high school tourism curriculum and three months of hands-on experience each year.

With this newfound expertise, our students are poised to make a meaningful impact in their communities, contributing to the local economy while promoting sustainable tourism practices.

## Ongoing Contributions of the Catholic Church



Over the past 30 years parishioners from Catholic churches in South Florida have made a tremendous difference in the lives of the students and families that we serve in Guatemala. Generous parishioners at St. Patrick Church, St. Vincent Ferrer Church, St. Christopher Church and Holy Cross Church have helped us feed our students with the proper nutrition. This in turn, assists them with proper study habits. Monsignor Tom Skindeleski has led countless pilgrimages with Florida Knights of Columbus to our school in the jungle where they have worked side-by-side with our students building school furniture and teaching English. We are truly grateful for this faithful support.

## 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, P.O. Box 3636, Tequesta, FL 33469**  
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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 fundraising arm of Ak' Tenamit.

