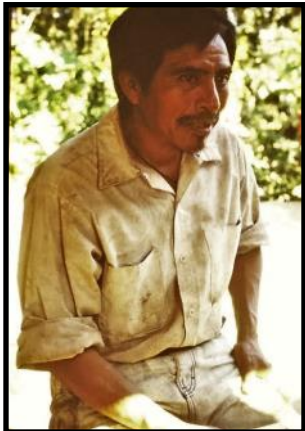


FOCUSING ON THE IXCÁN

EYE CARE AND EYE HEALTH EDUCATION FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE IXCÁN REGION OF GUATEMALA

Vol. 12 Issue 2

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Pedro sat on a small wooden stool outside his house in Santa Maria. He'd just come in from working on his farm and his tan work shirt and frayed jeans were stained with dirt and sweat. My friend was interviewing him. We were learning about his time (12 years) as a refugee in Mexico and before that about the massacre in his village and how his family and many others hid out in the

PEDRO—AN INSPIRATION by DR. SCOTT PIKE

jungle for several months waiting in vain for the soldiers to go away.

It was 1996 and my first trip to Guatemala. I spoke no Spanish. Pedro spoke no English. I learned that he was a health promoter in his village because he had learned some health care skills while in Mexico. Since his village was a cooperative and there was no doctor in the vicinity, Pedro used his new knowledge as his contribution to the betterment of his community. He had a passion for helping people with their health concerns.

But he was having trouble with his eyesight and reading the instructions on medicines. He was 44

and needed reading glasses. I knew others must also have the same problem, so I asked him if he'd like to have an eye care program for his village. This was the beginning of our partnership. My ideas and his devotion and dedication to caring for his community started our many years of learning from each other.

I taught him some fundamentals of optics, eye conditions and eye/vision testing. This was challenging given our need for a translator and his 3rd grade education. Pedro's intelligence more than made up for his lack of education. He was up for the task.



"Pedro's intelligence more than made up for his lack of education."



Pedro learns about eye care procedures



Pedro applies his new found knowledge

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What I've learned from him are things more fundamental about life; endurance, perseverance, survival and the importance of family and community. His willingness to volunteer his time kept me wanting to help him. I supplied glasses, testing equipment and training so Pedro could provide his community access to basic affordable eye care. I couldn't deny his devotion to improving the lives of those around him.

In this remote region of Guatemala there are 80,000 people living in poverty. While we can't make them all middle class citizens with the wave of eyeglasses or an eye surgery, we can give their lives more meaning and add dignity and quality to their lives, little by little, slowly tipping the scales toward more comfortable lives. Here we are 20 years later, Pedro and I, brothers in a cause. We still have language challenges and aren't able to talk easily to each other, but we communicate in our continuing desire and willingness to work together for the common cause of better eye health for his neighbors in Ixcán.

This past spring, Enfoque Ixcán completed the process to be a non-profit organization in Guatemala and our appointed legal representative is Pedro. It's satisfying for me to be able to continue to have Pedro by my side representing our organization.



Don't forget to go to [AmazonSmile.com](https://www.amazon.com/smile), select Enfoque Ixcán, so a percentage of each of your purchases supports El's efforts.

Sometimes, the wait is worth the time.

The five minute recipe is alive and well in the kitchens of modern day America. But there was a time when my wife's immigrant Italian grandmother would rise early in the morning and spend the day preparing one of her exquisite family meals in a small kitchen with little counter space and using a converted coal burning stove. The comparison with today's modern expansive kitchens with granite countertops and banks of appliances is almost laughable. But the best five minute recipe cannot begin to compare to the final meal served up with a side serving of love after those many hours of labor.

It seems at times that waiting for the eye clinic to be built in Guatemala is similar to waiting for Gramma's meal. And, just as gramma's final dish is the result of the blending of various ingredients, the recent trip I made with Dr. Pike to present a proposal to the Mayor's Council asking them to donate land for building the clinic brought to my mind the critical importance of the many people who are the ingredients of this important project.

Anyone who has traveled to Latin America knows the importance of watching what one eats and especially drinks. Otherwise time ends up being spent on trying to get well than in doing what they are there for. Ruth at the café Girasoles can be one noted for the supporting role of providing delicious meals that were all natural and very tasty ... her guanaba drinks were very refreshing. And she did this in a kitchen area even smaller than gramma's! We both remarked that she would be highly successful if she brought her café to Portland or any city in the U. S.

Emiliano is a local developer and politician in Playa Grande who is an

active supporter of the request of land from the local government. Although he is not on the council due to losing the last election in the mayor's race, he actively worked behind the scenes with those on the council to encourage their support. One afternoon Dr. Pike and I had in a preliminary meeting with Emiliano and some of the council members plus others who shared and offered guidance.

The family owned Visualiza clinic in Guatemala City has been a long term resource, supporter and friend of Dr. Pike and Enfoque Ixcán. Their model of equally serving the poor as well as the wealthy, which has been recognized by the World Health Organization, is a model for Enfoque Ixcán so their guidance is especially valuable. There we met with Douglas, Director of the clinic. A very personable, smart and contemplative man, he would offer up advice and guidance about the project in a very supporting manner. We also met with Chito who is the architect for the clinic and will provide the crew for building it. He was very encouraging and mentioned that this was very similar to what their clinic in San Benito in the Petén was like when it first started. This is where Enfoque Ixcán patients currently go for their surgeries.

There are, of course, many others in Guatemala who are key supporters such as Jorge, the manager of the Guatemala electric company; Ernesto, who owns a chain of high end bakery products; Caralampio, a member of the council who is a new acquaintance from a remote village in far western Ixcán and whose enthusiasm was very evident when he showed us the land; and the list includes many others.

We cannot say just when the clinic will be completed, but when it is, it will have been the work of many people in Guatemala as well as the U. S. And it will be a dish worth waiting for.

**ROTARY
INTERNATION-
AL
GRANT AP-
PROVED**

BY DR. PIKE

After 3 years of grant writing, rewriting, modifying and correcting, our Rotary International Global Grant received final approval in May. It's complicated because several Rotary clubs, a Rotary District and Rotary International all came together to support this matching grant.



It started with the Forest Grove Daybreak Rotary Club.

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COUNCIL OF ELECTORS

- J. Eric Anderson
- Dr. Shannon Currier
- Suzanne McCann
- James Harrison Pike II
- Joene Pike
- Connie Running
- Dr. Ronald Craig Stout



Dr. Pike helps Marie Elena explore reading with her new low vision aid

SPOTLIGHT UPDATE: MARIA ELENA

A year ago we had a newsletter story about a woman we examined who was found to have a brain tumor. This is an update on her condition.

The path to Maria Elena's home is breathtaking! But, not for the scenery. She lives on the other side of the longest, steepest hill in her village. The day we visited her was a hot one, so when we arrived we were out of breath and wet with sweat.

In February, 2015, when we went to the village, Maria had been having "trouble" with her vision. She waited for our arrival to have us check it out. Our testing showed poor vision, but nothing we could do improved it and there were no signs of problems within her eyes. We suggested that she go to the eye clinic where we send eye surgery patients. Luckily, there was a group going there the next week.

The doctors at the clinic determined that she may have a brain tumor and sent her to Guatemala City. It was a tumor and she had surgery to remove it the following week. She was lucky we found the tumor when we did, or she may not have lived. But, she was unlucky that access to care wasn't more available so she could have been diagnosed sooner so her vision may have been saved. Access to health care is a problem in this region of Guatemala.

We visited Maria Elena in a garden area of her family's home. Beautiful flowers

perfumed the air, fruit hung from nearby trees, a family parrot squawked his views occasionally, a couple of pigs lounged in their pen and her children played in the yard. It was a tamed piece of jungle which felt like a paradise. There was a slight breeze to dry my sweat soaked shirt.

Maria Elena's vision is now significantly reduced and we provided her with some low vision aids, hoping she might be able to see enough to read a little. With a 6X magnification lighted magnifier she was able to read slowly from one of her school books. She used to be one of the most popular teachers in the primary school. The brain tumor and loss of vision have sidelined her from teaching.

We also gave her a telescopic device, called a monocular, with which she was able to see her children at a distance. Both of these aids will take time and practice for her to master. The hope is that they will enable her to expand her now narrowed visual abilities and give her access to some of the joys of life she used to experience. And, as time passes, we hope to deliver more sophisticated, digital visual aids for Maria Elena to work with.

Coping with reduced vision is a challenge for anyone, but living in a remote jungle village without concessions for disabilities is an extreme challenge. Maria Elena has the intelligence and motivation succeed. Your support will give her the means.



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ENFOQUE IXCÁN

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL GRANT APPROVED—CONT'D

Some good friends and past classmates at Pacific University from this club initiated the grant and they found additional support from the Forest Grove Noon Rotary and Beaverton Rotary. Then it was referred on to the local Rotary District for matching money and finally Rotary International approved it for a larger match. However, to complete an international grant, there needs to be a host Rotary club in the country we are serving. Our host club is the Coban Rotary Club in Coban, Guatemala, which is about 3 hours from Ixcán, where we have our project.

As complicated and time consuming as it was to secure, the grant is certainly worth it to Enfoque Ixcán. It provides nearly \$38,000 for equipment, supplies, and training. As we prepare to build a clinic in Ixcán the grant will allow us to equip the new clinic with modern, professional testing instruments and surroundings for our patients. Our eye health promoters will be able to use more up-to-date equipment and receive many hours of training on all aspects of eye care. Then we can use more of our budget (your donations) on direct eye care, like eyeglasses and funding for eye surgeries. Everybody wins!

The Board of Directors of Enfoque Ixcán salute and offer high praises to all the Rotary members and clubs involved. As our team of supporters grows, so does our ability to serve the people of Ixcán, Guatemala. This vote of confidence from Rotary for the sustainability of our project makes your individual donation all the more important and valuable. Now a greater percentage of each dollar donated will go directly to the improvement in someone's eye health. We look forward to your continued support.

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