** EVER WANTED TO VISIT THE IXCÁN? **

For many years people have been asking me if they could go along on one of our trips to Guatemala. Finally, the possibility is taking shape. Enfoque Ixcán is planning a delegation trip for the last part of May, 2011. There will be some sightseeing in Guatemala City, 2 days visiting the Mayan ruins at Tikal, and a special trip to the Ixcán.

This will be an informational trip, giving participants a chance to learn about the people, their culture, their history, their living conditions and their access to health care, with emphasis on the region of Ixcán. This will be an opportunity to see a beautiful and remote area not often seen or reported on, a poor region in a poor country, and will include conversations and interactions with the people. We will travel by van much of the way and stay in a small Ixcán village for 3 nights.

The cost for this 9 day culturally interactive experience will be $900 per participant and will include in-country travel, lodging and 3 meals per day. The airfare to and from Guatemala is not included. We are limited to 12 travelers who will be able to make a special donation. The chart shows, the responses through September have enabled this year’s emphasis on the region of Ixcán. This will be an opportunity to learn about the people; their culture, their history, their studies, their lives and adventures providing eye care services to the people of the Ixcán. ~ By Dwight Fleck, EI Treasurer

---

** DWIGHT’S CONTRIBUTION REVIEW **

Listening to National Public Radio, or watching the local PBS-station, I am reminded how dependent non-profit organizations are on special fund raising drives. Whether the fund raiser is NPR or PBS or Enfoque Ixcán, a substantial portion of the year’s income is derived from fund raising drives. Recently, this organization sent out a fund raising letter to allow contributors to offer contributors the opportunity to make a special donation. As the chart shows, the responses through September have enabled this year’s emphasis on the region of Ixcán. This will be an opportunity to learn about the people; their culture, their history, their studies, their lives and adventures providing eye care services to the people of the Ixcán. ~ By Dwight Fleck, EI Treasurer

---

** AUGUST 2010 TRIP REPORT **

The August trips to the Ixcán are always very busy, rewarding and full of surprises. This year was no exception.

This trip consisted of an excellent group of optometry students from Pacific University College of Optometry’s Amigos Eye Care. The class of 2011 was represented by Kelvin So. Kelvin’s experience was a much used resource by the younger students. From the class of 2012 there was Cristin Mattone, Kevy Simmonos (the student co-leaders), Keri Burgard, Jean Havilla and Jesse McCarrell, and from the class of 2013 we had Kelci Rollitad, Cassie Solin and Anna Wells. I can’t thank students enough for their hard work, good spirits and exceptional group organization. They were a well prepared team. We were also fortunate to have Lisette Romig from the staff at the College of Optometry. Lisette’s Spanish language skills made her our prime case history person. Dr. Brian Arvidson from Bend, OR was with us for his 2nd trip to the Ixcán, and Dr. Rolando Cabrera from Guatemala City accompanied us for his 2nd trip. Our eye health promoters, Felipe and Arnulfo were also able to work with us.

---

** AMIGOS AND EI: PARTNERS IN EYE CARE **

As Manager of Academic Programs at Pacific University College of Optometry I always enjoy talking to optometry students about their studies, their lives and adventures. I have a passion for travel, languages and different cultures so, naturally, I take pleasure in listening to the returning Amigos talk about their adventures providing eye care in remote parts of the world. I was honored to be asked to serve on the Amigos Eye Care Board in 2004, and took my first trip with them this summer.

In mid-August, I joined nine optometry students on a mission to the remote Ixcán area of Guatemala. We left Guatemala City packed like sardines in a van with all our equipment and donated eye glasses and travelled 10 hours (the last three on unpaved roads) to the village of Cantabal. In this remote northern part of Guatemala, bordering Chiapas, Mexico, we were welcomed by the hospitality of the local people. The natural beauty was in stark contrast to the violence that swept through this land less than 30 years ago. For some of the students travelling with us it was their first time outside of the United States. Seeing the poverty of the whole week, as well. We conducted 4 days of clinics in 3 different locations and examined 916 people, dispensing 463 pairs of glasses. When you add in 3 hours of travel time of those days, it made for long days, but I heard no complaints. What I did hear was, “Did you see the man with the corneal scarring?” or “What do you think might have caused those retinal hemorrhages?” or “Did you see that lady smile when she put on her new glasses?” These are the comments that make working with the students so rewarding and rewarding and rewarding... Continued on page 3

** FOCUSING ON THE IXCÁN **

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

** VOLUME 6, ISSUE 3 **

** OCTOBER 2010 **

---

** INSIDE THIS ISSUE: **

** SPOTLIGHT **

** AUGUST TRIP CONT. **

** AMIGOS CONT. **

** VISIT THE IXCÁN! **

** CONTRIBUTIONS **

---

Contact Enfoque Ixcán
503.277.9711
enfoqueixcan@aol.com
www.ei@guatemala.org

---

** ENFOQUE IXCÁN **

13670 NW Pettigrove
Portland, OR 97229

---

By Scott Pike, EI Treasurer
SPOTLIGHT: E1 CATARACT PATIENTS

Epidemiological data suggest that there are over 4,000 people in the Ixcán who are blind from cataracts. In the United States blindness due to cataracts is nearly unheard of. The availability and safety record of cataract surgeries in the developed countries of the world means cataracts are rarely a cause of blindness. The success rate is among the highest for any surgery. The difference in the Ixcán is that poverty and access to eye care have rendered cataract surgery unreachable to most of the people.

Our eye health promoters and the Amigos Eye Care group from Pacific University identify 60 to 70 patients each year needing cataract surgeries. This year alone, on our August trip with Amigos, we found and will use our funding to refer 50 patients. Because cataracts are so easily corrected in our country, we don’t usually realize how this common problem for people over 65 can be visually blinding and what that means to one’s quality of life.

Five of our cataract referral patients were briefly interviewed to give you an idea of how a difficult life in the Ixcán, is made more difficult by cataracts and the lack of resources for their safe removal.

Teodoro R., age 84, is from the village of Pueblo Nuevo. “Up until 6 months ago I was still able to work on my farm,” he told me. Now Teodoro’s vision is limited to light perception only. He is unable to go to town on his own and even needs help from his grandchildren to get around in his home. He says he “can no longer see his friends and needs help eating.”

Magdalena J., aged 78 years old and lives in Chalbal. She says she “sees a little with her left eye but nothing with her right eye.” She is still able to work in the kitchen, but not like before her best vision dropped to its current level of only being able to count fingers at 3 feet. What she misses most, now that her vision is so bad, “is being able to see people and to sew.”

Juana S., from the village of Maella said, “I can’t see faces any longer. My grandchildren have to be very close before I can tell who they are.” Juana’s visual acuity is 20/400 in her better, right, eye. At age 73 she is still very strong and healthy, so cataract surgeries could add much dignity and value back into her life.

Justo A., of San Juan La Quince is only 62 years old. His vision with his right eye is 20/240 and with his left, 20/120. While he is still able to work on his farm, he often worries about falling as he walks the rutted paths of his village. His family still depends on his help with the crops they need for food.

Vicenta C. came to the vision testing area with 2 of her granddaughters. These children, or others, accompany Vicenta everywhere she goes. “Without them I’m unable to walk outside my home,” she related. She lives in the very beautiful, and hilly, village of Vista Nueva. Her dense cataracts have stopped her ability to cook or sew. She would like to have some of her independence back.

These were the first 5 people we found with cataracts on our August trip, forty-five more followed. With modern cataract surgery it takes less than 15 minutes to safely remove and restore usable vision, yet these people are forced by their poverty to live their later years dependent on their friends and family for simple tasks like eating and enjoying the smiles on their loved ones faces. Your tax-deductible donations go directly to correcting this picture.

Amigos and E1: Partners in Eye Care...continued

the reason returning each year is imperative. We’re making a difference on two fronts.

Fifty people were identified who need cataract surgeries and 8 others need other eye surgeries. That brings up the surprise of the trip. While on the road to the Ixcán, Dr. Cabrera told us of a doctor who operates a new eye clinic only 4 ½ hours away from the Ixcán.

Through the miracle of cell phones, we were able to contact and then meet him at a pull-out on the highway and arrange to visit his clinic where we returned to Guatemala City five days later.

Most people who live in the Ixcán do not like to go to Guatemala City, too crowded, too noisy, too much traffic, intimidating and scary for these rural people. The new clinic, half the distance to the City, is in a small town and culturally similar to the Ixcán.

Over the next few months Felipe and Arnulfo will take groups of patients to the new clinic for surgeries. If the quality of patient care and surgical outcomes is good, we’ll be able to add another referral resource to our eye health promoters and the Amigos Eye Care group from Pacific University identify 60 to 70 patients each year needing cataract surgeries.

Five of our cataract referral patients were briefly interviewed to give you an idea of how a difficult life in the Ixcán, is made more difficult by cataracts and the lack of resources for their safe removal.

Teodoro R., age 84, is from the village of Pueblo Nuevo. “Up until 6 months ago I was still able to work on my farm,” he told me. Now Teodoro’s vision is limited to light perception only. He is unable to go to town on his own and even needs help from his grandchildren to get around in his home. He says he “can no longer see his friends and needs help eating.”

Magdalena J., aged 78 years old and lives in Chalbal. She says she “sees a little with her left eye but nothing with her right eye.” She is still able to work in the kitchen, but not like before her best vision dropped to its current level of only being able to count fingers at 3 feet. What she misses most, now that her vision is so bad, “is being able to see people and to sew.”

Juana S., from the village of Maella said, “I can’t see faces any longer. My grandchildren have to be very close before I can tell who they are.” Juana’s visual acuity is 20/400 in her better, right, eye. At age 73 she is still very strong and healthy, so cataract surgeries could add much dignity and value back into her life.

Justo A., of San Juan La Quince is only 62 years old. His vision with his right eye is 20/240 and with his left, 20/120. While he is still able to work on his farm, he often worries about falling as he walks the rutted paths of his village. His family still depends on his help with the crops they need for food.

Vicenta C. came to the vision testing area with 2 of her granddaughters. These children, or others, accompany Vicenta everywhere she goes. “Without them I’m unable to walk outside my home,” she related. She lives in the very beautiful, and hilly, village of Vista Nueva. Her dense cataracts have stopped her ability to cook or sew. She would like to have some of her independence back.

These were the first 5 people we found with cataracts on our August trip, forty-five more followed. With modern cataract surgery it takes less than 15 minutes to safely remove and restore usable vision, yet these people are forced by their poverty to live their later years dependent on their friends and family for simple tasks like eating and enjoying the smiles on their loved ones faces. Your tax-deductible donations go directly to correcting this picture.

In another new development on the August trip, I met with a Guatemalan attorney to start the process of becoming a registered non-profit organization in Guatemala. Establishing this status will allow us to work more easily with Guatemalan organizations, governmental agencies such as the Guatemalan Ministry of Health and local communities within the Ixcán.