

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 sight-seeing 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.

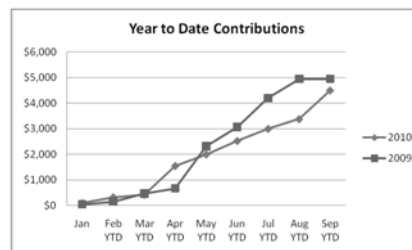
The cost for this 9 day culturally interactive experience will be \$900 per participant and will include in-country travel, lodging and 3 meals per day. The airfare to and from Guatemala is not included. We are limited to 12 travelers and need to hear from you as soon as possible to firm up the reservations. If you have an adventuring spirit and a curiosity for how others in our world live, call or e-mail me for details: Scott Pike, 503-277-9711, Enfoqueixcan@aol.com. I look forward to hearing from you.



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 year-to-date contributions to approach last year's.

Importantly, these drives also highlight the contributions made during the year outside of the special drives. 75% of this year's contributions have come from regular monthly donations. Whether donations are made monthly or during a special drive they both are important in enabling Enfoque Ixcán to achieve it's mission of providing eye care services to the people of the Ixcán. ~ *By Dwight Fleck, El Treasurer*



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

AUGUST 2010 TRIP REPORT

BY SCOTT PIKE

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 Mattione, Kevy Simmons (the student co-leaders), Keri Burgard, Jenn Havrilla and Jesse McCarrell, and from the class of 2013 we had Kelci

Rolfstad, Cassie Solis and Anna Wells. I can't thank the 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 5th 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

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 2 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

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Cristin and Lisette taking case histories

AMIGOS AND EI: PARTNERS IN EYE CARE

BY LISETTE ROMIG

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 ten 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

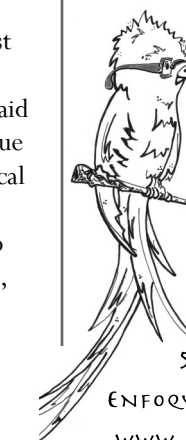
the area and hearing heart-wrenching stories of families in exile and brutal murders were eye-opening for those students.

During clinic days I was assigned the job of recording patient histories and general translation. I had studied Spanish for the last two years and my newly-acquired language skills paid off. I was aided by Enfoque Ixcán's two wonderful local health promoters, Felipe and Arnulfo, who are also fluent in K'iche and Mam, native Mayan languages, predominately spoken by

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SPOTLIGHT: EI CATARACT PATIENTS



Teodora from Pueblo Neuvo



Magdalena from Chalbal



Juana from the village of Maella

Epidemiological data suggests 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 realized 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. is 78 years old and lives in Chalbal. She said 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.



Justo of San Jaun La Quince



Vicenta with her granddaughters in Vista Nueva

AUGUST TRIP...CONTINUED

the reason returning each year is so 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 1/2 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 when

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 add another referral resource to

AMIGOS AND EI: PARTNERS IN EYE CARE...CONTINUED

the older population. The five minutes I spent with each patient were barely enough to record a case history, especially because answers to my questions included not only eye health, but the state of their family and community as well. I found these encounters very rewarding and it opened a whole new world to me.

Whenever I had a brief moment to look over my shoulder I saw the line of waiting patients. The line was not getting any shorter even though we had been working for hours. Some patients travelled for hours to see us and had gone years without vision care; the thought of helping them kept me going. I knew we were all working as hard as we could.

In addition to our clinic days in Cantabal we travelled to remote villages of Vista Nueva and Tzetún to screen

school-age children and adults. During these bumpy rides, squeezed close together in the van, I talked with the students about their motivation to come to Guatemala. They each expressed the desire to get more experience in practicing optometry and to experience another culture and help the people who need it the most.

"I am grateful for the opportunity. This morning I did a foreign body removal. A procedure you don't get to do very often, not even for a 4th year student," exclaimed Kelvin So, a 4th year optometric intern. Kari Burgard, a 3rd year optometry student, added: "Since high school I have wanted to go on a medical mission. I especially wanted to go on this trip because we are providing sustainable eye care."

On our way back to Portland, Oregon, there were

better serve our patients' eye care needs. We will include a report in our next newsletter.

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.



New eye care clinic



Students waiting for eye exams at the primary school in Vista Nueva



Anna conducting a far acuity exam

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many hours to talk about our experiences. When asked about their favorite memory of the trip and if they would go back to Guatemala, the overall answer was an emphatic "Yes!" Everyone was so impressed by the beauty of the country and the hospitality of the people. Some will go back as students on another Amigos trip; others will go back as doctors providing eye care where it is needed.

For 1st year optometry student and Amigos President -Elect, Cassandra Solis, this was, indeed, a rewarding trip. Her father was born in Guatemala and left when he was nine. "I would like to come back with my dad one day and meet family and old friends." There are several reasons to go on a trip like this in the first place, but many reasons to return.