

Habitat Newark Volunteers Build Homes in Guatemala

Newark, NJ, March 2011: A group of volunteers who work regularly at Habitat for Humanity Newark were among the contingent that recently built homes for the poor in rural Guatemala. Although this was not an official Habitat for Humanity effort, the goals and aims are similar to the same and they succeeded in helping people who would normally have no other way find a greatly improved and safer place for their family to live.

Led by Jim Tierney, Executive Director Emeritus of Habitat Newark and a member of the Board of Directors, the group participated in a program sponsored by From Houses to Homes Guatemala a Morristown, NJ (<http://www.fromhousestohomes.org/>) based non-profit organization that has been operating in Guatemala for about six years. The NJ crew built house #399 and #400 during this trip.

In addition to Tierney, also in attendance were John and Jeanne Scott of Upper Montclair. John is a former President of the Habitat Newark Board and he and Jeanne have attended Habitat Builds in several locations worldwide. Also in Guatemala was Pete Sullivan, Vice President of Habitat Newark's Board, and Jim Fehon, a former New Jersey resident now residing near Charleston, SC and a regular volunteer with Sea Island Habitat.

In Guatemala several million people, many of whom are of Mayan Indian descent, live in poverty huts constructed crudely with tree branches, corn stalks and corroded sheets of corrugated metal for roofs. Their floors are made of dirt, which in the rainy season turns to mud. They seldom have doors never windows. Worst of all, they usually have an open fire cooking arrangement set up inside their huts that is not properly ventilated and creates smoky, unhealthy living conditions.

From Houses to Homes Guatemala program works with these people, on their land, building a home with a concrete slab floor, cinder block sides, a secure door and a window for light. The roof is properly attached to the structure so it drains and will last for many years. The new home gets families out of their huts where they burn their fires and into safe homes with a smoke free, much healthier atmosphere.

From Houses to Homes Guatemala works in the villages around Antigua, Guatemala a city that at one time served as the capital of Central America. Numerous significant earthquakes during the centuries left behind historic ruins in a uniquely Central American environment. With headquarters in Antigua, From Houses to Homes works in villages such as Santa Maria de Jesus, Altenango and San Antonio Aquas Calenti.

In addition to the 400 plus homes now constructed the From Houses to Homes program builds and operates special schools. The schools, in Pastores and Santa Marie de Jesus, educate children who may not be able to attend a public school. Admittance requires active involvement by parents in the learning process and in operation and maintenance of the school. Children are fed breakfast when they arrive and professional teachers ensure they learn with the latest techniques of effective education methods. The goal is to help these children get the education they need to prosper in the outside world. From

Houses to Homes Guatemala completed building the first school a year ago, and fund raising to build the school in Santa Maria De Jesus has just begun.

Healthcare is another huge issue in Guatemala. From Houses to Homes just completed construction and opened a health care clinic in Pastores with a full time doctor on staff, nurses and a part time dentist. The clinic, which features up to the minute equipment and furnishings will provide health care services and medications at no cost and will help many people get medical attention they would not have been able to afford.

From Houses to Homes helps the local community in many other ways as well. During recent visits from the New Jersey crews, the program was able to distribute food and necessities to almost all of the families they had built homes for. The families found their ways, into Antigua where they picked up a bag of food which would provide about three weeks of supplies for a family. These supplies were made possible from a private donation.



Many blocks need to be modified so that reinforcement bars can pass through easily. Jim Tierney demonstrates how this works with his trusty hammer.



After footings are dug and poured the cinder blocks go up one by one. This is where it stands at the end of day #2.



Near the end of day #3 the walls are starting to take shape and you see Jim Tierney and Jim Fehon taking a photo break in front of the soon to be home.



Jeanne Scott works mortar in between the cinder block to make sure the new house is tight and solid.



It took a crew of seven volunteers, the new owners and two staff builders from From Houses to Homes but as you see the building has topped off and now ready for a roof.



New Jersey volunteer workers enjoyed an extra experience this year when they were able to help distribute over 400 bags of food and necessities to families that “From Houses to Homes” has built homes for. Here John Scott hands a woman her supplies.