

Nueva Esperanza is a school supported by the Ripple Effect Program.

Nueva Esperanza is Spanish for New Hope: new hope for the children of the misplaced, persecuted, dispossessed and nearly forgotten; new hope for the future of San Antonio Quiche in Guatemala.

Descending between two magnificent mountain peaks the pilot cuts the engine and with a skip and bump our Cessna comes to a halt on a rough clearing pretending to be a runway in the jungle. We are met by men of the community suspicious and wary of outsiders. Suspicious, because the guns that killed so many came from outsiders. Children of all ages flock around us curiously as we proceed to the school.

Their community, high in the mountains northwest of Guatemala City was born out of conflict. Thirty six years of bloody civil war left 200,000 dead and 50,000 missing. Hundreds of thousands more were displaced. Undeniably, Guatemala is a war-torn country.



San Antonio's 245 families emerged from the jungle 10 years ago. They settled on land provided as part of the peace accord to three disparate villages obliterated during the conflict. How this inaccessible community manages to carve out a living is a testimony to the resilience of the Maya. Each village had been a different ethnic group; each had a different language; each had its unique history. These people had but two things in common; nightmares of living on the run from the army and guerillas, and a steadfast determination to survive.

Our interpreter explains that the men had built a basico (grades 7-9) before erecting a small primary school for the children born in the jungle during the civil war. With the post-conflict population growing, there is a need for more primary school classrooms.

The men present us with a business proposition. They ask Rotary to provide 70% of the cost of two buildings to replace mud-floored makeshift wooden structures. By hand, in less than 2 weeks they had cleared a piece of land and dug a foundation, but now they need money for building materials. With the coming of the dry season, it would be possible soon to haul in material across riverbeds. The detailed plan they anxiously present is signed by many with fingerprints.

Nueva Esperanza, New Hope, is the uniting bond of the people here. They hope that education will allow their children to acquire skills that will open opportunities. Such education will enable them to become a vibrant, economically sound community connected to the world beyond the borders of San Antonio.

Six months later, the first new class rooms would open with funds contributed to Nueva Esperanza from the Rotary Club of Kenora and District 5550 through the Ripple Effect Program.

But more than money, Rotary delivers reason to hope; it builds partnerships and establishes new bonds. In Nueva Esperanza, there will be opportunity where there was none, dreams where there was despair and trust where it had been lost.

