

Mission 2007

Visitation student helps fellow youths, in Guatemala

By Elizabeth Wu

Andy Baden's wish list for his 10th birthday was typical of a boy his age: toys, games, sports equipment. What was remarkable was that he planned to donate it all to children less fortunate than himself living in Guatemala.

Last year, Baden's third-grade class at Our Lady of Visitation raised money to benefit Cooperative for Education (CoEd), an organization with a goal of eradicating poverty in Guatemala through education.

The students gathered money from sponsors to support

hours they spent reading rather than

watching TV during a week-long read-a-thon. Baden was inspired and touched by what he learned during that experience and took personal action.

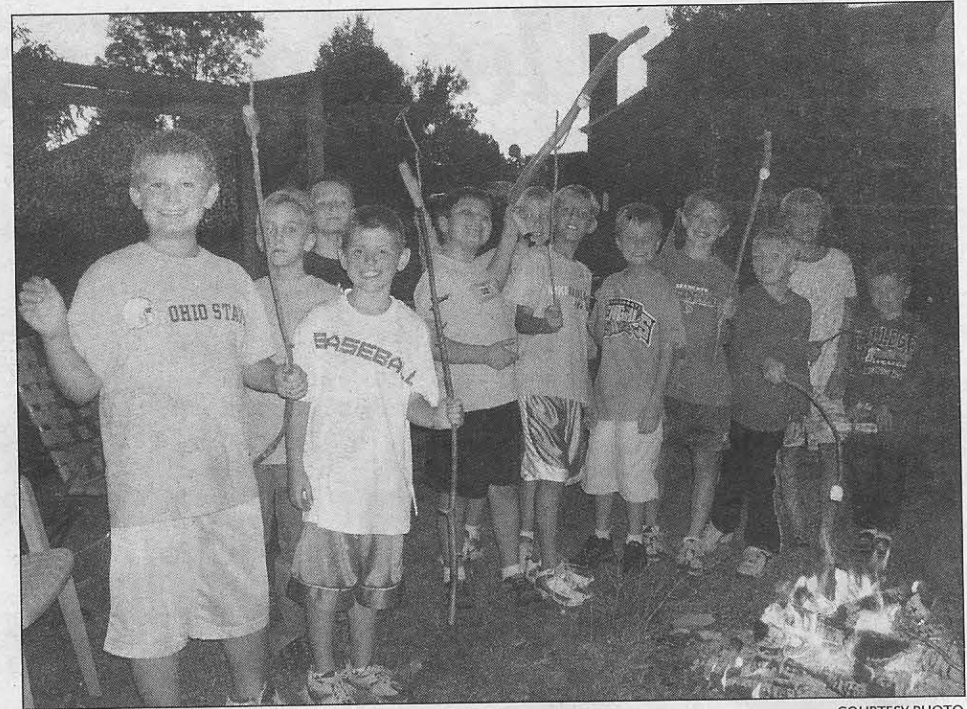
For his birthday this year, he wrote up party invitations to all his friends requesting donations, rather than gifts, of items he thought Guatemalan children his age might enjoy. A few weeks earlier, his mother, Carol Baden, had asked him how many things he *really* needed. He took that thought to heart.

"My own room has enough toys to keep me busy for weeks," Baden said. "Our garage is filled with bikes and balls. My basement has video games and air hockey. I chose Guatemala because CoEd inspired me to help kids who have barely enough to eat, books for school and sports supplies. I heard true stories of the way kids live in Guatemala. I wanted to give them cool stuff, things I have so many of."

Jessica Stieritz, senior projects coordinator for CoEd, said, "What the third-graders do at Our Lady of Visitation is really impressive. In the last eight years, they have raised more than \$6,000. Besides helping Guatemalan children, this teaches a really valuable lesson to our children — you can make a difference, no matter how young you are. Andy is a perfect example of that."

At Baden's birthday gathering, 11 children brought everything from sports equipment to books, games and school supplies. To any onlooker, the party was just that. They had a campfire, played capture the flag and ghosts in the graveyard and ate junk food.

However, for the children who participated, the event was much more. "I felt very good, very warm inside," Baden said. "I liked opening the presents with my friends at the party, and they liked giving to CoEd as much as I did. We all did a good thing together."



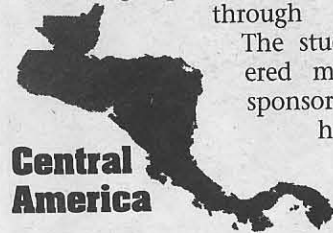
COURTESY PHOTO

Andy Baden, fifth from left, poses with friends at his recent birthday party, where he collected items to be donated to youths in Guatemala by Cincinnati-based Cooperative for Education.

Baden wants to do it again next year, but bigger and better. He also sees this line of service in his future.

"I would like to become a computer technologist, and I would use my skills and money to help give computers to CoEd. Then CoEd can help kids in Guatemala learn so much more, and maybe even send e-mails to kids like me."

For more information please visit www.coeduc.org or call 513-731-2595. ■



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