

# Voluntourists' give to Guatemalan kids

By **Stephanie Romine**  
*Enquirer contributor*

**L**ike many retirees, Suzanne and Ed McCarter take frequent road trips across the U.S. and like to spend much of their winters in warm locales.

But in addition to sightseeing in the United States and taking cruises, the Oakley couple also spends a couple of weeks a year volunteering in Guatemala with the local nonprofit Cooperative for Education.

Their "voluntourism" trips are part of a growing trend among baby boomers. As they near retirement age, they're bucking clichéd pastimes. With more education and a longer life expectancy than any other generation, retirees are maintaining the busy lifestyles they've always

had.

According to a 2005 study by the Research Triangle Institute, about one-third of the 77 million baby boomers volunteer, giving them the highest volunteer participation rate of any demographic group. The growing number of boomer "voluntourists" is a natural evolution, says David Clemmons, who founded the Web site VolunTourism.org in 2003 to educate, empower and engage people to combine travel and community service.

"They have the money, the wherewithal, and obviously the drive to use their skills and talents," says Clemmons, who was inspired by a lifetime of volunteering and 15 years in the hospitality business.

"Voluntourist" trips often have a deeper impact than volunteering around the

neighborhood. Being in that different setting, you're able to touch the destination and the (work) in a such a profound way, far deeper than you would at home," he says.

The McCarters' trips are an extension of volunteer work they do in Cincinnati year-round. Ed McCarter is currently the chairman of the board of trustees for Cooperative for Education; Suzanne helps plan their annual Fall Fiesta and other fundraisers. And she spreads the word about the group's sustainable textbook programs and literacy campaigns to her friends and family. While the couple says they enjoy the local work they do for CoEd, they say the trips are a way to recharge their batteries and remind them why they volunteer.

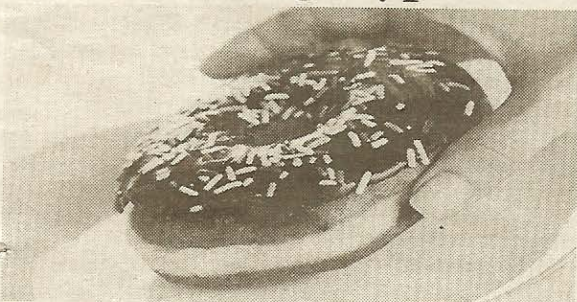
In addition to visiting the schools CoEd helps, meeting scholarship students and participating in inauguration ceremonies for the program that bring out entire towns, the McCarters and the other 25 or so people on the tour spend a weekend at volcano-ringed Lago de Atitlán and another weekend in Antigua, Guatemala's colonial capital.

The tourism and the reputed beauty of the Central American country was what initially drew them to CoEd and the tours back in 2005, after some friends introduced them to the group during a benefit wine tasting. "We decided that because we never would have come to Guatemala otherwise, we would go with our friends," said Suzanne McCarter, 60.

Ed McCarter, 52, agreed. "We really came down here to travel, but then once you're down here, seeing the kids - it sucks you right in. We had the time, and I didn't really realize it, but I guess I was looking for something to do. This filled the void."

Immediately after that first trip, they began volunteering for the Oakley-based nonprofit, which was founded by brothers Joe and Jeff Bernin-

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The University of Cincinnati's Department of Psychiatry is conducting a research study of bipolar adults (ages 18 to 55 years old) who have gained weight while taking the medication Zyprexa. Qualified participants may receive an investigational study medication, that is not approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration for weight loss, which may decrease their weight. Participants may receive medication over 16 weeks at no cost. Compensation is available for time and travel.

**For more information, please contact:  
Joy at (513) 558-3674.**

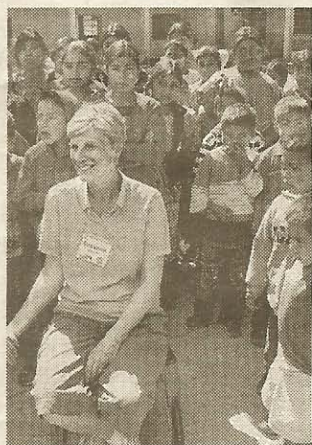
All inquiries and participation will be kept confidential.

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Photos provided by Stephanie Romine

**Suzanne McCarter** (below) and her husband, Ed, worked with Guatemalan school children and visited the nation's capital, Antigua, known for its view of Volcán Agua (above).



ger in 1996 to help Guatemalan schoolchildren end the cycle of poverty through education.

Soon the McCarters were planning a return visit with more friends.

The McCarters just returned from their third trip to Guatemala. No two trips are ever the same, says Ed McCarter. On the national level, the number of Peace

Corps volunteers who were 50 years or older has increased from less than 1 percent in 1966 to almost 6 percent last year. Other local organizations are seeing similar trends among their volunteers.

Since 2005, Crossroads Community Church has taken 1,700 people on volunteer trips to Mumbai, India; New Orleans; and Mamelodi, South Africa. Tim Senff, the director of ReachOut programs for the church, said that while the trips have always been multigenerational, they've seen a marked increase in the number of boomers and retirees in the last couple of years.

"We see a lot of retired boomers sticking their toe in the water by taking one of these trips," he said. "They realize it's better than playing golf or going to Florida to spend the winters," then they come back and bring along friends and family.

## Nation's numbers

- Guatemala, located in Central America, is about the size of Ohio.
- Bordered to the north and west by Mexico, the east by Belize and the south by El Salvador and Honduras, Guatemala has a population of about 14.5 million.
- Guatemala has the second highest illiteracy rate, in the Western Hemisphere, after Haiti. At, 75 percent, it is the highest in Latin America. In rural Guatemala, women complete an average of two years of school; men complete an average of three years.
- Spanish is the official language, but there are 21 Mayan languages and one Caribbean language spoken.
- About 75 percent of the people live below the poverty line, on less than \$4 a day.

Source: Cooperative for Education

The McCarters invited three people on their most recent CoEd trip – a retired couple from South Dakota, whom they met on a world cruise last year, and a friend from Cincinnati. They raved about the CoEd volunteer trips, but told the friends they had to come to see for themselves.

"You're just so involved in the schools," says Suzanne McCarter.

"The bonding experience and meeting all the new people ... on other trips you're just looking at things and shopping. This is really doing something."

*For more information on the Guatemala tours sponsored by Cooperative for Education or to learn about the nonprofit, which has set up sustainable textbook cooperatives, computer centers and literacy programs in approximately 10 percent of that country's schools, visit [www.coeduc.org](http://www.coeduc.org) or call 513-731-2595.*