



Guatemala Update: Computer Lab

July 10, 2001

Steysi Muj, a fourteen-year-old Indigenous girl, rose from her seat in the crowded auditorium and approached the microphone. Around her, crammed into nearly every available space, were the four hundred red-sweater-clad students of Tecpán school, their teachers, parents, school officials, and the town mayor. Nervously, she bent the microphone down to her lips, unfolded a piece of paper and began to speak:



"It's not enough for women these days to know how to sew and cook, if we want opportunities, we have to learn how to use technology. Today we are being given a dream that we have had for a long time-to have the chance for a better job and a better life."

Steysi's words echo the feelings expressed by students, teachers and community leaders over and over again at the inauguration of the Cooperative for Education's first computer lab on May 18 at Tecpán National School in Chimaltenango.

Funded by Microsoft, this project is designed to bring vital marketable skills training to Guatemalan high school students, which will encourage them to continue their education and help them find better jobs when they graduate. There was an amazed silence as members of the crowd--mostly poor farmers--passed the rows of brand new computers. "If we want to break the cycle of poverty in Guatemala" says Jeff B., "we have to give children the education and training needed to get better jobs when they become adults. Otherwise the cycle of poverty repeats itself endlessly."

Twenty new, networked, Internet ready computers will serve over seven hundred disadvantaged students and community members each year. Courses are underway to teach Microsoft Windows, Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Access. This was the first lab of its type to be implemented in Guatemala and is designed on a self-sustaining model that can be replicated anywhere in the world. Hats off to Howard Lobb, the Cooperative for Education's newest employee, who did an outstanding job leading the project team to a successful implementation.



Thanks again for the support you have given us over the past five years.

--Joe and Jeff Berninger

