



**Guatemala Update:
Scholarships-for-Community
Service project**

August 9, 2001

The first rays of morning sunlight streamed through the trees as we rounded the last bend of road above the tiny Q'eqchi village of Chamil, nestled among the rocky peaks and ridges of Alta Verapaz. It is a remote and stunningly beautiful region, but also one of the poorest and least educated in Guatemala. Our mood was heady and upbeat. After a year of



planning and preparation, we were arriving to inaugurate the Cooperative for Education's new Scholarships-for-Community Service project.

The white-shirt-clad scholarship students--eighteen of them--were waiting at the door of the school, along with about two dozen parents wearing their best Sunday clothes. A flurry of applause and handshakes greeted us as we opened the car doors and stepped out.

"In Guatemala," explains Joe, "compulsory education ends at the sixth grade. Government funding largely runs out after this level, so that attending middle school and high school is very expensive for poor families. As a result, fewer than one out of every five rural children continues their education beyond grade six."

Without the education provided in more advanced grades, these children have little hope of securing better jobs and are thus condemned to the same life of subsistence farming and coffee picking that they were born into.




The Cooperative for Education's Scholarships-for-Community Service project matches promising students with U.S. sponsors, who agree to pay their education costs for one year. In exchange, each student completes 10 hours per month of community service. This year's projects will include cleaning streets, planting trees, picking up garbage, painting walls, and tutoring younger children. In addition to providing a rare opportunity to attend secondary school, this project teaches valuable leadership and citizenship skills and introduces the concept of community service.

"I never thought I would have this chance to go to school," said Margarita Cuz Yat, one of the eighteen scholarship recipients for 2001 (see photo to the right). "How can I thank you and all our 'patrons' for what you've done for me? I promise to take advantage of this opportunity and use this gift well."

--Joe and Jeff Berninger





K'ij'ni \Y'd3' According to our project teachers, textbooks improve the quality of a student's education by more than 70%. Your help can make a significant difference in the lives of Guatemalan children.

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