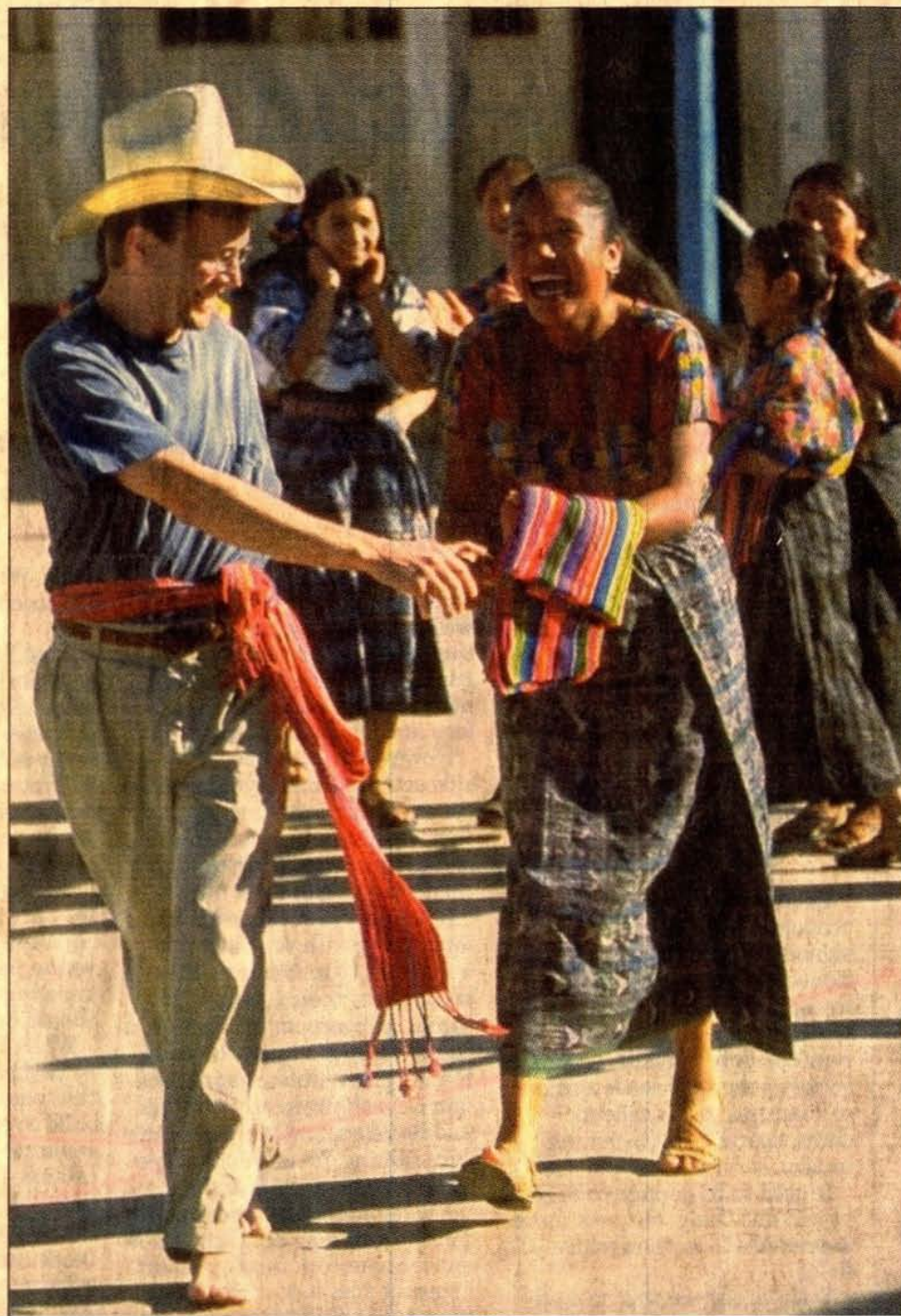


Volunteers deliver school supplies to Guatemala



Jim and Beth Schenk hand out pencils and pens at Tecpan Cooperative School in Tecpan, Chimaltenango, Guatemala.



In other

Lima native Jim Schenk, wearing the sash and hat of the indigenous (Mayan) garb (borrowed from a student), joins in the traditional dance at Santos Inocentes School in Parramos, Chimaltenango, Guatemala.

WORLDS

By **STACEY WALSH**

• Special to The Lima News •

Sweeping landscapes and water color vistas capture the attention of most who visit the Central American country of Guatemala. But it is the smiling faces amidst unspeakable poverty that are burned in the heart and memory of Lima native Jim Schenk.

"I knew going to Guatemala would be an eye-opening experience," said Jim Schenk, "but I did, not expect it to affect me so emotionally."

The nine-day trip in January was indeed an emotional rollercoaster for Schenk and his wife Beth, a native of Kettering, who traveled south of the border as volunteers for the Ohio based non-profit organization, The Cooperative for Education.

The Schenks joined 16 other Ohio volunteers traveling dirt roads and steep mountain paths to deliver text books and school supplies to 11 indigenous Mayan schools. The mission of The Cooperative for Education is to break the endless cycle of poverty in the once war-torn country through education.

"Guatemala has the highest illiteracy rate of



Students in the Chimaltenango region of Guatemala have received textbooks from the Cooperative for Education.

1997 with his brother Joe. "In many communities three out of every four people can't read or write."

The Berningers, former Xavier University classmates and roommates of Jim Schenk, both

■ INFORMATION

The Cooperative for Education at (513) 731-2595, or it can be found on the Web at www.coedproject.org.



opportunities," said Joe Berninger. "Although jobs are available, most natives lack the skills needed to fill them."

Guatemalans face such daunting problems as malnourishment and even death from simple infections.

"If you can get a basic education you increase your possibilities for a better way of life," Joe Berninger said.

Schools in Guatemala receive little to no help from the government, according to the Berningers. As a result most schools have no learning materials.

"Class time is spent copying instructions from the board, so there is no time for real learning to take place," said Jeff Berninger, who experienced this firsthand as a volunteer teaching English. "The cooperative is alleviating that problem by putting books in the classroom."

In four years more than 73,000 books have been distributed. The Schenks delivered textbooks to small Mayan schools near Santiago and

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and Chimaltenango, Guatemala.

"The students and their parents were so gracious," Jim Schenk said. "Some of the parents thanked me with tears in their eyes, telling me they themselves could not read or write, but hoped the textbooks would make all the difference for their children."

Beth Schenk was equally touched. "These parents work hard, and they want to help their children, they just don't have the means," she said. "It seems like we are doing such a small part, but it is going to make all the difference."

The program is making a big difference for teachers. A survey of participating schools found teachers saying the addition of textbooks enables them to double the amount of work they can complete in one class.

"The teachers feel the books have increased the quality of education in terms of retention, enthusiasm for material, and the students ability to analyze information," Joe Berninger said.

"It is hard to understand the struggles schools face here," adds Jim Schenk. "It is certainly very different from my experience at Lima Central Catholic."

Schenk credits his experiences at LCC as part of the reason he got involved with the aid project. He attend LCC from 1981-1985.

His father, Jim Schenk Sr., of

the Lima area, agrees, "I think Father Herr and Jim's own mother were instrumental in influencing his desire to perform social work. Both Jim and Beth consider it a privilege to be able to help."

The Schenks live in Cincinnati, where he is a senior manager in corporate finance for Federated Department Stores and she is an account executive for Yellow Book, USA.

The Schenks said their experience in Guatemala was life-changing.

"When you see that level of struggle, it puts life into perspective," said Jim Schenk. "It also makes you want to do more, both here at home and there."

Beth Schenk agrees. "This was an opportunity for us to make a difference in the lives of these children and help them in the same way someone has helped us in the past," she said. "Pay it forward."

The Schenks say they have barely unpacked, and are already to return to help. The Berningers are hoping their program can help the people of Guatemala, and other Third World countries.

Jeff Berninger says it will be his life's work.

"We have created a model here that is working. My dream is that it can be replicated wherever it is needed."

Stacey Walsh, also a college friend of the Berningers and Jim Schenk, also traveled to Guatemala as a volunteer.