

Naples-based charity builds 4 schools in Guatemala

Miracles in Action has built 15 schools since January 2005 and has two more in the works

By TRACY X. MIGUEL

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In a remote mountain village in Guatemala, about 130 students once sat on a dirt floor classroom inside a tin shack with no electricity.

Today, the kindergarten through fifth-grade primary school in the mountains of Hue-hue Tenango in rural Guatemala has a new school with five classrooms, desks and electricity thanks to donors of Miracles in Action, a Naples-based charity.

Ten local donors of Miracles in Action recently traveled to rural Guatemala to open four new schools and one water system.

Among the sponsors who traveled to Guatemala was Magdalena LaVerdiere of Naples.

LaVerdiere, who is a licensed psychologist, visited the primary school she funded for \$32,000 in Canton San Antonio, Guatemala.

In its first day, the school had 167 students and it anticipates more, she said.

There is no running water in the remote mountain village of Canton San Antonio, with a population of 580 people, so the Mayan people travel to the bottom of the mountain to get water from a pond.

LaVerdiere, who has lived in Naples for seven years, said the level of Guatemala's poverty is not seen in Collier County.

"I was shocked by how poor it was in Hue Hue Tenango," said LaVerdiere, who sewed school bags for students.

Attendees also got to meet the villagers who supplied the labor to build the schools earlier this year.

The charity has built 15 schools since January 2005 and has two more in the works, Penny Rambacher, founder of Miracles in Action, said.

“The villagers provide the labor, the government provides the land and later the teachers and Miracles in Action provides the funds for building materials,” she said.

The estimated price to build a three-room school with bathrooms and a kitchen is between \$19,000 to \$24,000.

Miracles in Action has been raising awareness and funds to help poor families help themselves through education and vocational training.

Attendees also distributed donated items from the local community, including school supplies, sweaters and toys.

Also, the women and small children of the village received blankets, pillows, sweaters and jackets.

LaVerdiere decided to join the organization’s efforts to support education because it’s a substantial project that will help them better their lives.

“It was an amazing experience, which I hope to do again,” LaVerdiere said.

In 2006, LaVerdiere visited Guatemala after donating funds for the pipeline of a water system in a different Mayan village, near San Martin.

And she plans to continue helping.

LaVerdiere plans to donate money to help install concrete block stoves in the homes of Canton San Antonio where many children suffer from respiratory problems and serious burns because families cook over open fires inside their homes, she said.

“I hope to continue doing projects with Miracles in Action,” LaVerdiere said.

To learn more about Miracles in Action, visit www.MiraclesInAction.org.



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