

Countryside Residents Leave a Legacy of Learning- 2012 Update

John DeStefano's name brings a smile to many residents' faces. He entertained friends and neighbors at his Countryside home from 1990 until his passing in April 2008. That's 18 years of parties, fabulous food, and time with our dear friend John - full of gusto! We all miss him, especially at the holidays.



John DeStefano with Guatemala School Children

read and write, they can never get ahead, as he did.

John funded the building of a rural primary school in Tierra Colorada, Guatemala, and he was there to cut the ribbon, distribute backpacks filled with school supplies, plant a tree, and meet the extremely grateful villagers who greeted him with clapping, smiles, laughter, and a chorus of "gracias" (thank you). John said that it was one of the happiest moments in his

life. A generous donation by John has supported the building of four more schools in rural villages.

This life-changing experience was shared by another Countryside resident, who had the same overwhelming experience in gifting education to 100s of grateful Guatemalan Mayan children. Noreen Rambacher (resident 1998-2006) funded the first rural school and planted the seed for more schools through Miracles in Action, a 501c3 charity founded by the Rambacher Family.

Noreen grew up in Canada and remembered as a child not having a winter coat to keep her warm. She realized that even though they were poor, she lived much better than the children she saw in Guatemala, living in dirt floor huts, or scavenging for food at the city garbage dump. That is "extreme poverty," something that does not exist in the US or Canada. Henry Rambacher, too, experienced poverty and

Noreen Rambacher with Guatemala School Children



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John is also remembered elsewhere in the world, through his support in building five schools in rural Guatemala helping impoverished children to get an education. John visited Guatemala with Countryside resident Penny Rambacher in 2007, to learn more about Miracles in Action, the volunteer-run charity founded by Noreen and Penny Rambacher in 2005 to aid impoverished rural Guatemalans with basic life necessities.

John shared with Penny that when he was a small boy in Italy, his mother had to carry water from the village well back to their house on a daily basis. Watching his mother struggling to carry the heavy jug while holding his hand with the other, brought tears to his eyes. He explained that his parents immigrated to the US to find a better life. When he witnessed the poor Guatemalan villagers living in worse conditions than his own in Italy, it touched his heart and gave him a better understanding of why so many Guatemalans come to Florida seeking work. John believed that if we can help them get an education, they will stay in Guatemala and can feed their families, without the desperate need to come here illegally. John said that he could have been in this same cycle of poverty, had his parents not come to the US where schools are available to all, and there are opportunities to get ahead. John started by selling tomatoes in the North end of Boston and built a successful department store display business. He felt that if poor people can't



Canada Night!

Saturday, January 21st
Reserve: 353-1780 x 5

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Happy New Year!

2012

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(L-R) Noreen, Penny, & Henry Rambacher

while growing up in Germany as a boy during WWII. Henry said, "When you have so little, and someone helps you out, you remember this all your life. So now, that I have so much more in my life, it is time to give back and be the one who helps others." As a 25 year volunteer with SCORE (Service Core of

Retired Executives), Henry knows about giving back. A retired CPA, he has counseled over 1,800 entrepreneurs in starting a business in Naples, as well as helping his daughter Penny establish the non-profit charity Miracles in Action.

Noreen was well-known at Countryside for teaching mahjong, holding great Halloween parties, and for her arts/crafts/sewing, but also for her love of life and people...some similarities with John DeStefano. Possibly these common traits led to their desire to leave a legacy, and be remembered for something that made a difference - to leave the world a better place for having been here. Penny Rambacher shared that her mother was her best friend, and when she passed away, John helped fill that void with his caring and friendship. She promised them both to carry on their legacies of learning and continue opening doors to break the cycle of poverty for their "grandchildren". Penny said, "I never had any children of my own, but there are plenty of children out there who need someone to care. I am grateful that I found this passion and purpose for my life. I am blessed to be able to keep my promise to my mother and John

- Miracles in Action is now constructing our 37th school in rural Guatemala. Somehow I feel that Noreen and John are making these doors open, and they are still playing a part in making miracles."

Noreen Rambacher's Legacy:
Co-founded Miracles in Action School Projects:
#1 San Antonio el Cornejo
#2 Pocoxpan
#4 El Chocolate
Noreen Memorial Fund
Open Windows Library

John DeStefano's Legacy of Schools Funded:
#7 Tierra Colorada
#16 La Vega
#17 Osuna
#22 Canaques
#28 Santa Cruz Vocational School (John Co-funded this school, our largest to date).

Most schools are for primary education, with 3 classrooms, latrines and a kitchen. The villagers donate all the manual labor for construction. The Guatemalan government provides teachers, and often the skilled labor or land. Miracles in Action donors fund the construction materials. Without that key initial funding, the school projects would not happen. 100% of donations go directly to projects in Guatemala. Operational expenses are covered by income from the sale of handicrafts made in Guatemala, and support from Henry Rambacher. For more info, visit www.MiraclesInAction.org



Children Holding a Sign for John DeStefano



Destefano School