



Our Year in Review

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P.O. Box 56716
Albuquerque, NM 87187-6716
www.frombookstobrilliance.org

From Books to Brilliance Directors

Kim Covill
Founder, President
Maggie Covill
Founder, Vice President
Bronwyn Stephanz
Secretary
Debbie Gonzales

Contact us

kimc@frombooks.com
maggiec@frombooks.com



Mayan children welcoming their Austrian and American guests

More Villages...More Books!

The past year brings more stories...stories of impoverished villages and their utter lack of educational resources, but also stories of bustling libraries and grateful communities.

From Books to Brilliance (FBTB) remains committed to our mission of providing literacy materials to these under-served communities. In spite of the grinding poverty in which they live, citizens envision a day when their children have choices for a different and better future. They understand that with literacy comes power, and the potential to improve their lives. Thanks to our many kindhearted supporters, we are fortunate to report that *FBTB's* mission continues here in New Mexico, in Nicaragua, and has expanded into Guatemala.



El Pantanal's library...more books and freshly painted!

Nicaragua

Here *FBTB's* three previously established libraries continue to expand, now providing several villages with access to thousands of books. In addition, Maggie Covill and Brianna Seidlitz did much to transform two of these modest libraries into more inviting and productive

spaces. Local houses typically lack tables and chairs or adequate light to comfortably enjoy a book. A suitable place to read and write is difficult to find. Determined to create a haven for the community's eager readers, Maggie and Brianna purchased child-sized tables and chairs, had bookshelves built and painted the library

Support *From Books to Brilliance* at
www.goodsearch.com.

Your online searches and purchases will raise money for village libraries at no cost to you!

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walls in brilliant colors! The children are very enthusiastic about their revitalized libraries, currently the most pleasant places in town. Many children and students arrive daily from nearby villages to read, to do homework, or simply to color. As word of these libraries spreads, we expect to see an ever increasing number of students utilizing the libraries designed just for them! The following is a brief description of each location:

Biblioteca From Books to Brilliance, El Pantanal

Created in 2010 and named by the *José de la Cruz Mena Elementary School*, teachers currently manage this library. By raising money through local fundraising events, village leaders are planning to hire a full-time librarian. In August, Zoraya Chavarría, one of the school's teachers, accompanied *FBTB* volunteers to the capital city of Managua to purchase



Zoraya reading with children at *Biblioteca From Books to Brilliance*

specific reference books, as well as books of fiction, for their small collection. To express the village's appreciation, a lovely formal presentation of speeches and traditional dances followed. This small library serves the

many students from El Pantanal's five small schools and some nearby villages.

Biblioteca Paraíso del Niño, El Fortín

Many children refer to this library, founded

in 2009 and housed in the town's community center, as their "second home." Maria Teresa, a well-educated community organizer, oversees this library with the help of several competent high school students. The village of El Fortín is well-known for the incredible progress it has made over the past six years. Seeking help from provinces in Spain and France, the *University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire*, and a local women's cooperative, the town now enjoys potable running water, a sewage system, a bakery, a bridge, and many pastel-painted cement block houses, which replaced cardboard and metal shacks. Given that the library now holds a wide variety of texts, reference books, and fiction, María Teresa is planning for the village's next giant step forward...access to a computer or two! *FBTB* hopes to support that dream.

Biblioteca Samuel Vidaurre, Mulukukú

Established in the mid-1980s under the watchful eye of Samuel Vidaurre, then the town's only teacher, this library was closed for twenty years after Samuel was killed in the Sandinista Contra War. In 2007 with a grant from the *Dr. Seuss Foundation*, *FBTB* facilitated its reopening with almost a thousand new children's books. The *María Luisa Ortiz Women's Cooperative* recently renovated a



Library volunteer in El Fortín's growing library

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space for this growing library adjacent to their “cyber café” with lighting, tables, and bookshelves, all designed to facilitate the needs of



Mulukukú preschool

its readers. In addition, this library loans educational materials donated by *FBTB* to a local preschool, in an effort to promote early childhood literacy.

Guatemala

In July, *FBTB* also initiated literacy projects in Guatemala, with tremendous assistance from a Rotarian, Mr. Fritz Baaz, also the headmaster of the *Instituto Austríaco Guatemalteco*. The *Instituto* is a very prestigious private school in Guatemala



Accounting class at Aj Awinel

City. Their accomplished Austrian and Guatemalan teachers not only deliver a first-class education to many urban children, but also engage in educational projects in rural Mayan villages. Though Guatemala has a higher standard of living than Nicaragua, its literacy rate is the lowest of any Spanish speaking country in the western hemisphere. The indigenous Maya, speaking more than twenty different languages, make up an estimated 51% of the country's population. Spanish is taught in school for those fortunate children that are able to attend. Our Austrian hosts prearranged visits to the villages of El Estor and Santo Tomás. With a matching grant from *Rotary eClub of the Southwest USA*, *FBTB* purchased the first books for the two Mayan schools listed below. We plan to expand their collections this year.

Aj Awinel, El Estor

Many of this small high school's students are sent from nearby mountain villages, and live with host families in El Estor. A newly rebuilt space located on campus will soon be the location of a library to serve the specific needs of the local Mayan community. Student and teacher-led fundraisers have

been underway, both in Guatemala and in Austria. In July, *FBTB* donated desperately needed science, accounting and music textbooks to this school. Please see *Biblioteca Pública* at www.ajawinel.com. Elderly Mayan weavers were delighted to receive this year's allotment of over two hundred pairs of reading glasses donated by Albuquerque's *All Saint's Lutheran Church*.



Beautiful books for Mayan elementary students in Santo Tomás

Centro Educativo Austríaco Maxeño, Santo Tomás La Unión

This little elementary school certainly knows how to welcome guests! Expecting only their Austrian supporters, *FBTB*'s Bronwyn Stephanz and Kim Covill, added to the children's excitement. Thankful speeches, Mayan dances, and charming

More Villages...More Books!

songs from every class were followed by gifts of hand-woven textiles, and a delicious homemade luncheon. With third graders taking copious notes on Mayan musical instruments and sixth graders learning about pre-classical Mayan culture, students were eager to learn. Here some textbooks are available, but there were no colorful children's books. These young students are delighted with the reference books and beautiful literature donated by *FBTB* last summer!

New Mexico

Here in New Mexico our work with *La Vida Felicidad* (formerly *Mosaic*), continues, though under a new name and location due to changes in funding. Nevertheless, this organization that assists people with disabilities now expects to have an even greater reach in the Hispanic and Native American communities. With a yet to be determined location, their library will provide a much needed venue in which to promote early childhood reading and family literacy. *FBTB* is eager to add to the seven hundred books acquired last year from Mercedes Fruland with *Usborne Books* and from



"Thanks, *From Book to Brilliance*, for helping our education and our reading...we will become the greatest heroes of our nation!"
Centro Educativo Austríaco Maxeño

Albuquerque's *James Monroe Middle School* students.

Telling the complete story of *From Books to Brilliance* becomes more complicated and challenging every year. We can easily write about the thousands of books that are now available to children in five Nicaraguan and Guatemalan villages, where previously few, to none existed. We can also convey the citizens' enthusiasm for their libraries by describing inaugural celebrations, complete with Latin American music, folk dances, bursting piñatas, and heart-felt speeches. However, when considering the many individuals and organizations that have

supported, and continue to support, our mission to promote literacy in these under-served communities, there is no way we can list everyone here who has helped us. Nevertheless, please know that *FBTB* and the communities we serve are very grateful. All the individuals involved and their untold stories fill in the blanks and provide the exclamation points for what is the unabridged story of *From Books to Brilliance*. We know that without you we could not write this latest chapter. We thank you all!

We appreciate your support!

Rotary eClub of the Southwest USA

Rotary Club of San Juan Island

Rotary Club of Ciudad de Guatemala

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