



# Our Year in Review

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## Partners, Planning and Preparation



We welcome Emanuel Carrera Requeña to the FBTB team!

Twenty-five year-old Emanuel Carrera Requeña lives in the town of El Estor, in the Department of Izabal, Guatemala. As the village's head teacher Emanuel advances quality education for the boys and girls that reside on the banks of the Sauce River. A licensed professional in business administration, Emanuel began working for the Seacacar Canyon Natural Reserve Tourist Center in January of 2017. He promotes and helps manage projects that benefit, both socially and economically, the Q'eqchi Mayan village of Seacacar, which has strengthened his determination and love for this community.

Almost a year ago, residents from the Guatemalan rainforest village of Seacacar traveled by land and water to celebrate with five young scholars. From Books to Brilliance (FBTB) volunteers had participated in the town's middle school graduation the day before and now would witness one girl and four boys proudly accept their diplomas from Ak' Tenamit. An exceptional high school located on the Dulce River, Ak' Tenamit specializes in rural economic development and sustainable tourism, highly marketable areas of expertise for the region's indigenous population. With their coveted diplomas in hand, these five Mayan teens found jobs quickly and began to earn entry-level salaries that were twice the national average! But in March the coronavirus altered their plans. Businesses closed. Everyone returned home.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to



From Seacacar, Ak' Tenamit high school graduates

challenge us worldwide. For FBTB volunteers, travel to Central America is currently impossible. Furthermore, it means that all schools in Guatemala are closed until 2021 at the earliest. In Nicaragua, public schools remain open, but FBTB village libraries are closed to minimize the virus spreading. Regardless, with the help of our liaisons in both countries, plans for reopening are moving forward. We are thrilled to announce that Emanuel Carrera Requeña is now our official representative in Guatemala. A talented

educator and business professional, Emanuel will soon travel to El Estor, Rabinal, Santo Tomás la Unión, Momostenango and Seacacar to assess each literacy project. In Nicaragua, Indira Morales and Frank López, partners since 2009, are delivering educational materials, along with "library sanitizing kits" and face masks for children and librarians, to our six projects on the outskirts of the city of Granada. With these dependable, local partnerships we continue to grow our libraries and look to the future again.

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Last October in Guatemala City, our volunteers grew by four. Ana Alvarado Toj, a teacher at Jun Toj elementary, and her son Brian arrived by bus from Rabinal. With a wish list in hand, they were equipped to shop for the literature requested by their school board.



Ana and son Brian, from Rabinal, Guatemala



Kim Covill, with Nicaraguan partners Frank López and Indira Morales, joining us in Guatemala

Indira and Frank spent two long days on a bus from Nicaragua, excited to see our projects in Guatemala and together plan for the future growth

of our libraries in Nicaragua. Fortunately, our long-term partners from the Austrian Guatemalan Institute know the city and get things done! We were ushered from bookstore to office supply warehouse, and from bank to publisher. With some coaxing, all the boxes managed to fit inside the vehicles. And then, upon arriving "home" a delicious dinner quickly appeared on a table set for a dozen people. Speaking Spanish, English, German, and Achí, we planned. Another day, with books processed, inventory finished, and vehicles repacked, we were on our way to the villages.

So many partners, both at home and abroad, strengthen FBTB's effectiveness in creating community libraries. Some are visionaries who plan and organize. Some lend their expertise. Many, like you, donate regularly. Others invite us into their homes, and watch out for us while in other countries. Meet just a few!

### Paul Heesaker, Founder of Seacacac Natural Reserve, Colorado, USA Opportunity in the Midst of Crisis

*Guatemala's Q'eqchí Mayan people have endured five centuries of injustice and violence, but if history can be called to witness, the Q'eqchí will surely press on. At least one riverside village now has a foundation to build upon and turn crisis into opportunity. The residents of Seacacac, a village that lies along the turbulent waters of the Sauce River, have shown just how resilient and forward looking the Q'eqchí are. They have traditionally been subsistence farmers who slashed and burned the rainforest to plant corn and beans. But, when given the chance to restore and preserve their beautiful homeland, community leaders seized on the opportunity. The result? The Seacacac Cañón Natural Reserve.*

*Six years ago, the community constructed a rustic riverside lodge and created trails that provided access to a jungle wilderness. Travelers arrived. Accompanied by local youth, guests delighted in floating the river between towering limestone walls and learned about Q'eqchí ancient culture. The residents of Seacacac discovered that this was their green gold mine. Tourism incomes could fund educational opportunity for their children. Instead of laboring in the fields and starting families in their teens, young men and women graduated high school, found good jobs, and even set their sights on university studies. It all seemed too good to be true, especially for a culture accustomed to facing one setback after another.*

*Unfortunately, in March 2020, Covid-19 forced all Guatemalan schools to close. Tourism incomes dried up like corn stalks*



Seacacac students with high-quality textbooks and materials purchased with a grant from Arizona's Rotary District 5495



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*under the midday sun, and children joined their fathers to search for work on distant plantations. Quarantines caused a food emergency. FBTB organized Soup and Stories, a relief program which provided several weeks of food during the crisis. Older students read stories to the children, building on literacy gains and using resources donated by Rotary eClub of Silicon Valley and Rotary eClub of the SW USA.*



**Soup and Stories, a reading and feeding program during the quarantine**

*Local teacher Emanuel Carrera initiated an online Spanish school, once again with FBTB support. Although the school is still in the development phase, three teachers are already working with adult and student learners in the United States. The program holds promise not only for individual learners, but for the rapidly growing need for quality online learning opportunities in high schools and universities worldwide. These online students will become the future visitors who reignite tourism in the Seacacar Cañón Natural Reserve once the pandemic passes and travel restrictions end. Travelers who come to learn can provide a long-term funding source that expands educational opportunity to children throughout the Sauce River watershed.*

*More hard times lie ahead, but the Q'eqchí are resilient people. They hold on tight to opportunity, especially when it means their children can benefit. We thank you for your support.*

### Emanuel Carrera, Head Teacher, Seacacar, Guatemala Soup and Stories

*Because of donations from FBTB in June, the Soup and Stories program was a success, providing Seacacar communities with opportunity and hope.*



**Thank you, Rotary District 5495!**

*We are getting accustomed to the books and are very proud of learning new things...so that we can be leaders someday in our community. We are learning to read, write and speak in another language. The books also teach us how to take care of the forest and the animals here. If not for you, we wouldn't be able to study. Please come to our community so that we can show you what we are learning. We now know the benefits of reading. We are very happy.*

**Students at Instituto Básico Comunitario, Seacacar, Guatemala**

*Although classes were suspended throughout Guatemala due to COVID -19, Seacacar children were able to benefit from a daily 90-minute reading lesson followed by a nourishing meal. Extreme poverty affects almost all Seacacar families, who are without fixed incomes, so the students' parents were happy, relieved, and motivated to have their children take part. We managed to feed 116 people even though the prices of consumer goods were higher than usual because of the virus. We bought our rations from vendors in the village of El Estor, which meant we helped support the local economy as well.*



**Reading, art, and we get to eat lunch!**

*Additionally, John W. generously sent money for washable, reusable masks for each of the program participants. Everyone wore their masks as though they were "in uniform." We put names on the masks, so that if any went missing, we could identify who they belonged to. All involved in the program took every precaution when it came to hygiene, disinfecting their hands and arms with gel alcohol and observing social distancing always. Because the routine was new to us, I will admit it took some getting used to! Many thanks for your dedication to the Seacacar community.*



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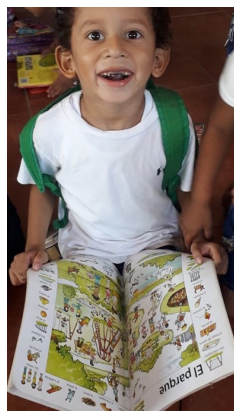
### Board of directors, teachers, parents of Jun Toj (elementary), Rabinal, Guatemala

*A special thanks from the board of directors to our From Books to Brilliance friends for the batches of books and learning materials donated to the library. The teachers are very pleased because both the books and the materials have helped bolster the learning of the students at Jun Toj Bilingual School. The parents send their sincere gratitude for contributing to the support of the students. They are happy to hear their children’s joy, which confirms they were right to enroll them in the school and become part of the Jun Toj family.*



### Indira Morales, Liaison, Granada, Nicaragua

*FBTB began the formation of a library in El Diamante, a community of Granada where most of its students travel from Las Isletas, the small outlying islands in the “Great Lake.”*



*Today (Feb. 20, 2020) I send photos of our visit this morning to the Solidaridad Library, where we shared joyous experiences with the children...and where a teacher there expressed much happiness and enthusiasm since the library provides a great quantity of books and materials that enrich the work of the students.*

*During this worldwide pandemic FBTB has played an especially important role by providing students and librarians with “sanitizing kits” that include disinfecting supplies and masks to prevent the spread of the virus in six village libraries. This initiative motivates the kids to go to the libraries and to learn habits of hygiene as well.*



### Bill Sinfield, Sandia Preparatory School, Albuquerque, NM USA

*Sandia Prep senior and Project Manager for From Books to Brilliance, Luke Baca ‘20, took the lead on Saturday to help restock Free Little Libraries with books donated by Sandia Prep students and families.*

*During these stay-at-home days, what a great opportunity to read more! There are 100,000 Free Little Library book-sharing boxes around the globe. Luke focused on stocking seven locations across Albuquerque, including those in the southwest area of the city, Westgate, in the International District, and in the North Valley...Well done, young man.*



### Speaking for the FBTB Team

*Luke has coordinated various projects for FBTB and traveled to Central America with us for the last six years. He is now at the University of New Mexico and plans to study medicine. Our team wishes him great success, and eagerly waits for the time when he can lend us a hand in the creation of village libraries once again.*



**Many thanks to you and so many that make this mission possible!**

