



## ***Our Guy in Guate***

Volume 1, Issue 1

Each week I will provide updates on what is happening with AEHCA and in Ipala. As AEHCA grows, so will the report. I'll give overviews of:

- specific projects;
- what's happening on the board of directors;
- what's up with our key partners;
- what we are considering for future projects;
- responses to YOU our donors, when you have questions about our activities;
- and ultimately discuss how we will grow out to earn our name Education and Health in CENTRAL AMERICA.

Each week the report will focus on one theme, but likely include short spots on other topics. For example, next week's topic will be the two separate floods that hit Ipala so far this rainy season and how AEHCA responded to help the most vulnerable victims. I'll also offer a look at some ideas for future projects based on recent requests from schools and philanthropists.

Welcome to the first of weekly reports you will get from your spokesman and reporter in Ipala, Chiquimula, Guatemala. This first report will serve as an introduction to what this report will bring to you each week, along with who I am, and what my connections are to Guatemala.



Now I should introduce myself.

I'm Vernon Archer, Vice President of AEHCA since early 2020. I had significant experience and knowledge of Ipala and Guatemalan culture prior to joining AEHCA, so let me share with you a little of my background.

I first was introduced to Ipala in 2008 while Mayor of Riverdale Park, Maryland. The Mayor of Ipala visited Riverdale and soon thereafter we created a sister cities agreement. Over the following 10 years we did annual teacher exchanges between the cities as well as numerous official government exchanges, and Riverdale Park became accustomed to having annual events with local Ipalteco immigrants (Ipaltecos Ausentes). The sister cities program has been dormant since the onslaught of COVID-19 but I remain hopeful that the next calendar year will see renewed teacher exchanges and some technical exchanges between the two towns.



In 2009 another opportunity to connect with Ipala opened up when the community church I attended (Cedar Ridge Community Church) decided to focus its international outreach and aid in Guatemala. I had nothing to do with that decision, but once it was made I jumped at the chance to have Cedar Ridge explore setting up shop in Ipala. After two visits to Ipala in 2010, in 2011 the church began sending annual youth/adult mission trips to Ipala and set up a local board of trustees to suggest projects and then administer them. The church quickly set up scholastic financial aid for students who needed help continuing secondary level education, small capital projects at schools, house builds in cooperation with the municipality of Ipala, and assistance to obtain needed medicines. I remain active with Cedar Ridge's programs in Ipala up to today, and you will be hearing more about them in future reports.



As you likely know, AEHCA is something of a spinoff from Cedar Ridge. Billy Earles participated in several church trips to Ipala and got the idea of starting a separate non-profit organization to help fund more projects in Ipala, and as the organization's name suggests, expand to other parts of Central America. Billy invited me to come on board as Vice President in late 2019 and we quickly realized that we shared a passion to help in Guatemala through cooperation and learning from local people. We share a real God-sent mission to build bridges between Americans and Guatemaltecos and other Central Americans. Working together, we know that we all can help Guatemala educate its people and create more healthy living conditions for its citizens.

The most recent part of my story comes as I recently retired from public education and decided to move to Ipala and live with my wife in my in-laws' house. It's probably not too surprising that I met an Ipalteca and fell in love along the way. I've been very happily married to Laury Cerna for 3 years and even more happy now that we will be living together all year instead of just visiting when jobs (and COVID) allowed.



So that's who I am as "Our Guy in Guate" and what you can expect going forward.

One more thing! We need your help! Please donate! We especially need your help now.

While we have the resources now to follow through on our existing commitments, we have almost nothing left over to respond to the unexpected since helping Ipalatecos recover from the most recent flood (more on this topic next week). Please go to our giving page and commit to a monthly donation! Some examples of what a monthly commitment can be turned into over a year's time: \$20 per month is sufficient for 26 bags of food basics; \$38 per month covers one scholarship that gives a young person the chance to go to university; just \$10 per month will pay for 4 school desks!

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