

# KGAP newsletter

## Summer Greetings from Connie Vanderhyden

by Connie Vanderhyden, KGAP Coordinator

I hope you are all enjoying a beautiful and fruitful summer!

This newsletter is arriving later than usual because I wanted to have the most recent update on the situation in Chaculá to share with you. I traveled to Guatemala in February/March with my sister-in-law, Andi Alexander, Shawn Lavoie and 6 Youth Initiative High School seniors: Josiah Mangold, Abbie Pedersen, Aurelia Sterling, Esther Crotser, Livian Roth-Amoldt, and Matilda Shortridge. Andi and I joined the group for the week at language school outside of Quetzaltenango and for our time in Chaculá. We arrived in Chaculá on March 3rd and had to depart two days later due to a flare-up in the 28 year-long conflict with the neighboring village of Aguacate.

There are two articles in this newsletter written by members of the community summarizing the conflict situation. It was a very difficult decision for Shawn and me to make, but the uncertainty and seriousness at the time led us to depart. We had many deep conversations with the students, explaining the history of the unresolved land conflict between the villages. They were all very mature and concerned for the people, understanding that Chaculá has always worked toward a peaceful resolution of the disagreements but had never received much support from government officials nor any good will on the part of Aguacatans to come to an agreement. Our friends in Chaculá were very sad they couldn't go forward with the itinerary they had created for the students' week of activities due to their community obligations during this time of stress. We witnessed the coming together of the entire community to confront this serious and dangerous situation. Their solidarity and commitment to reaching a peaceful settlement was inspiring. And, for the first time in 28 years, there seems to be commitment on the part of the governor of Huehuetenango and federal authorities to help resolve the issue once and for all.

Over the past months I have been in touch with community members weekly and, thanks to your generosity, KGAP was able to send a fund to assist the community financially as they had to repair their water cistern and tubing several times during this time of conflict. As you will read, at this time they are waiting for a meeting in early September with government officials and will hear their plan as to how and when an official land survey will take place to establish the boundaries between the communities of Aguacate and Chaculá. Chaculá has always shared the official paperwork and descriptions of their property but Aguacate has refused to do so.

Our KGAP sponsored scholarship students continue to excel in their studies and send greetings to all the donors as well as sharing their grade reports. I have included a letter from a student who graduated last fall and his graduation picture as an example of the lovely sentiments they often share with us.

We also have a report from Jubinal Carrillo Funes regarding the 2024 KGAP education fund and how it was distributed this year to support primary and middle school students, as well as high school and a few university students.

As always, thank you so very much for your continuing interest in and support for KGAP and the people of Guatemala!

Connie Vanderhyden, KGAP Coordinator



Connie and Doña Rosa saying goodbye



Liv and Lia with Chaculá family

## Letter of Thanks from Jubinal Carrillo Funes

*Teacher and Director of the Básico Institute*

Nueva Esperanza Chacula, Nentón, Huehuetenango, Guatemala. June 04, 2024.

Dear Connie, KGAP and YIHS Friends,  
On behalf of our organization of Colonia Nueva Esperanza, Chaculá, Nentón, Huehuetenango, Guatemala, we thank you for your solidarity support for the education of our community. In January, 2024, we received a donation from KGAP, including contributions from Marty Pearson, Youth Initiative High School student fundraiser, and CRLN (Chicago Religious Leadership Network/Martha Pierce.) These funds are distributed as described below.

The educational issue is very important and a priority for most of the families in our community as well as neighboring communities.

Within the report we send photos of our students in elementary, middle, high school and university. We are covering needs in these four educational levels and thanks to the support of KGAP donors, many students can continue and complete their studies. Last year three students graduated from high school as accountants and today all three already have jobs, which satisfies us because that is what we want all of them to achieve here in our country. In this way, they do not emigrate to other countries where they are exploited and discriminated against in the labor market.

Also, thanks to the support that you give us, most of the students who graduate from elementary school continue their studies in our community middle school (Instituto Básico) since they do not pay tuition or computer lab costs. They are provided with free education and this year we provided school supplies to all students. This motivates parents and they decide to support their children to continue their studies.

We are also grateful because, thanks to your support, we can keep the computer lab in good condition and we have more and more machines so that the students can have one machine per student when they receive their classes. This facilitates their learning because it is an eminently practical subject. We also maintain our facilities in good condition and a pleasant environment for our students to receive their classes.

We thank you very much for your support for our community and neighboring communities, we know that you do a great job to raise these funds for our students, thank you for such big hearts full of love for us. Thank you, thank you!!

We would like to give special thanks to Marty Pearson for continuing to support us as our friend Gerina did. We always remember her and carry her in our hearts, she and Connie started this great project.

We send our greetings and hugs with love from friends of Chaculá, see you soon.

Jubinal Carrillo Funes (teacher and director of Chaculá Instituto Básico)

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## Call to Community

*For Chaculá*

*Sometimes it comes at 3am,  
a megaphone attached to a rumbling truck  
announcing that today is the day*

*You didn't know, but you're also not surprised-  
tensions have been building  
something has to be done*

*you know that when your community calls  
no matter the hour  
you answer*

*your life is now on pause  
the plans you had for that day and the next  
and who knows how long, gone*

*but your life is never your own, you know  
that the water you cup in your hands was born  
from an inexhaustible source and will flow forever  
downstream*

*you know the call to community is a call to live  
as if the good and safe-keeping of all  
was yours as well*

*you roll out of bed, put on work clothes,  
and join your brothers and sisters on the line.*

*By Shawn Lavoie*

## Distribution of Funds

*Donated by the Kickapoo-Guatemala Project (KGAP) in Solidarity with NUEVA ESPERANZA CHACULÁ, NENTÓN, HUEHUETENANGO GUATEMALA.*

Support for 22 children of the elementary school children with the purchase of backpacks. Q341.00 for each child (total: Q7502.00 - \$967 U.S.)

Bag of school supplies for 80 elementary school students. Each student received a scholarship for their school supplies. Per student: Q465.00 (total: Q37,200.00 - \$4,795 U.S.)

13 students with scholarships for diversified education (high school). Each student will receive a scholarship in the amount of Q8,500.00 (total: Q110,500.00 - \$14,180 U.S.)

4 students with scholarships for university. Each student will receive a scholarship in different amounts, according to his or her needs. (Total: Q30,500.00 - \$3,932 U.S.)

Payment of 11 months of tuition for 80 students of Instituto Básico Chaculá (Middle School) Q35.00 per month. Each student will receive a scholarship in the amount of Q385.00 per year. (Total: Q30,800.00 - \$3,970 U.S.)

Payment of 11 months of computer tuition for 80 students of Instituto Básico Chaculá. Each student will be granted a scholarship in the amount of Q330.00 (total: Q26,400.00 - \$3,403 US)

Administrative expenses of Instituto Básico Chaculá. Q19,500.00 (\$2,513 U.S.) will be used during the year.

Purchase of 2 computers for the computer lab. (Total: Q10,000.00 - \$1,290 U.S.)

Purchase of four buckets of paint for the Institute's facilities. (Total: Q10,000.00 - \$1,290 U.S.)

Maintenance of the Computer Lab, 22 machines. Each machine Q250.00 (total: Q5500.00 - \$709 U.S.)

OVERALL TOTAL: Q 287,902.00 (\$37,115 U.S.)



*Chaculá high school and university scholarship students with teacher, Miriam Carillo*



*Chaculá elementary students with new school backpacks*

## Reflection from YIHS Student Esther Crotser

I arrived in Chaculá nervous; anticipating the challenges of living with a family of strangers, navigating the language barrier, and getting over bad-water related sickness. My backpack had been packed and unpacked numerous times during my trip in Guatemala so far. I became increasingly casual in how I stuffed my clothes, producing lumps that dug into my back. In just two days, I would unknowingly pack that bag for the last time.

I learned of the conflict between Chaculá and Aguacate before breakfast the first morning I woke up in my new family's house. Our small group sat on the floor of a dear friend's house, our eyes glued on Connie and Shawn who were explaining a decades-long political water conflict using water bottles to represent towns. Hours later we parted ways with our host families. This all happened so fast it wasn't until I was in the van waving goodbye to this town that I had a moment to reflect on this unusual, somewhat stressful situation. I wondered if it was the right choice to leave our new friends to navigate this conflict alone, and if I would see these people who took us in with such open arms again.



*Esther and Chaculá family*

The first thing I think of when I think about Chaculá is the kindness, hospitality, and bravery I saw in the people that lived there. My host dad greeted me good morning on his way to represent his family and community at the road blockade setup against Aguacate. My host mom made sure that I had enough food and blankets, as well as brought resources to the front lines. My host sisters, happy to be out of school even if the closure was due to intense political conflict, stuck by my side the whole time I was there. I'll always be amazed at the grace that the Chaculense people showed in being hosts, activists, and community members.

*Esther, Liv, Matilda, Abbie, Josiah, and Lia*



## KGAP Scholarship Winner Melvin Alexis Paiz Mejia

Dear KGAP Friends,

Good morning, afternoon or evening!  
I am sorry if I have been late with my letter but I have been very busy lately due to personal matters. In this letter I would like to thank you for the economic support that you have been giving me during my academic formation. Last Sunday, November 25, 2023, my graduation took place. Thanks to you, it was possible to achieve one of my goals and objectives in life. It is my pleasure to share with you a picture of me on graduation day, I do not have enough words to express how grateful I am. Thank you for being part of my journey as a student, this achievement is not only mine, but also yours, Thank you very much!!! I am totally grateful and I wish you success in your daily lives. Have a beautiful morning, afternoon or evening!

Melvin Alexis Paiz Mejia



*KGAP scholarship recipient, Melvin, at his high school graduation*

## Colonia Nueva Esperanza, Chaculá, Nentón, Huehuetenango, Guatemala July 12, 2024

To: Connie Vanderhyden and NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION KICKAPOO-GUATEMALA ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT(KGAP) AND YOUTH INITIATIVE HIGH SCHOOL (YIHS).

Receive a cordial greeting from the Board of the Cooperative Los Pinos, on behalf of all the residents of Colonia Nueva Esperanza, Chaculá, Nentón, Huehuetenango, Guatemala. We hereby share with you that our community was founded on January 12, 1994. We are a returned community that spent more than 12 years as refugees in Chiapas, Mexico. We returned to Guatemala to establish our community, Nueva Esperanza-Chaculá, with the hope of living in peace and working hard to develop as human beings in an environment of respect and peace. We were able to settle on land that the Guatemala government, through international support, was able to buy and donate to us so that we could build the place we live in today. It is the case that we are neighbors with several communities, but one of them started to invade our land 28 years ago. This community is called Aldea el Aguacate. We have tried to reach peaceful and fair agreements with them, but they have never yielded to any resolution with us. This refusal has affected us as a community because they are close to where we have our water source, and they have always ruined our tanks and water pipes that supply our community. To assert our rights, we have gone to the authorities but the problem had never been resolved. On April 15, 2024, there was a violent conflict caused by the community of Aguacate which caused damage, and required reconstruction of services to the community and also human effort to find a solution to the problem. Finally, the government authorities helped create an agreement between our community and Aguacate on May 8, 2024. With the financial support we received from KGAP, important expenses were resolved in the purchase of materials and supplies, as well as in the payment of human resources, which was of great value for us. Therefore, through this letter we thank you infinitely for the support given to our community during this very sad and regrettable problem we lived through.

(Note: The resolution to the land conflict with Aguacate is ongoing but for the first time in 28 years the national government is committed to helping the communities achieve a legal agreement. They have been present for several community meetings and will support engineers who will establish the legal boundaries between the communities. See article entitled, "Update".)

## Update on the Land Conflict Situation

On May 8th at ten o'clock in the morning in the municipality of Nentón, a meeting was called where each community was asked to present themselves with ten leaders in order to be able to make decisions. In fact, this meeting took place and after 5 hours of conversation between both communities in the presence of the two spokespersons from the presidential secretary, the colonel of the fifth brigade of the military zone of Huehuetenango, the human rights representative and the commissioner of the national civil police, it was concluded that both communities authorized the government to begin work to clarify the boundary markers that limit our communities.

On July 3rd we were summoned to a meeting at the governor's office to give us information on the progress of the study they are conducting of the farms owned by the Chaculá Cooperative and the farm of the Aguacate Community. In this meeting we were informed that Chaculá owns three farms which are Chaculá, Campamento and Nuevo Salamay, which correspond to an area of 183 caballerías of land. The Aguacate community owns 60 caballerías which include 20 caballerías of the community of Yalambojoch, 20 from the Aldea Yuxquen and 20 from Aguacate.

After this meeting, which made it clear that Aguacate has been invading Chaculá territory, we are calmer and happier because we did not provoke the problems. On September 3rd we will have another meeting where conclusions will be drawn as to how the boundaries of our communities will be defined. From July 3rd to this date, we are at peace and we have not suffered any more threats from the community of Aguacate and they have not ruined our pipes and water tanks. Therefore, we are now more relaxed, living with our families and carrying out our daily activities in a normal way.

This is what we are living, with more tranquility at the moment. I hope you are well, greetings and thank you very much for being aware of our community.

Thank you for your support, we always carry you in our hearts, greetings to all.

Sincerely the Community of Nueva Esperanza Chaculá.

# Many Thanks to our Recent Donors! December 2023 - July 2024

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YIHS student fundraiser

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are tax deductible  
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KGAP c/o  
Connie Vanderhyden  
E9048 Pierce Hill Road  
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KICKAPOO/GUATEMALA ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT (KGAP) see [kgap.org](http://kgap.org) for more information. KGAP is a project of Youth Initiative High School, a 501c3 nonprofit organization. Contributions are tax deductible. In addition, KGAP is affiliated with the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) a national non-profit organization that supports many projects and efforts in Guatemala. More information about NISGUA can be found at [nisgua.org](http://nisgua.org)

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