

news

OPTIONS TO OPEN FIRES

For centuries the indigenous people of Guatemala have been poisoning their lungs, burning their bodies and incinerating massive amounts of scarce wood simply to survive.

The traditional method of cooking in the indigenous communities is over an open flame called a "three-stone fire." These fires are contained inside one-room shanties with no ventilation. Women spend about six hours a day cooking and breathing in smoke, and because the fires sit directly on the ground, their children often fall into the flames, scarring them for life.

"It's not like they don't know they cook on the ground and that it's bad for them. But they're too poor to do anything about it," said Nancy Hughes, creator of a grant to replace the "three-stone fires" with healthier, more efficient stoves.

Hughes has accompanied Eugene-based Cascade Medical Team in conjunction with Helps International (www.helpsintl.org), a non-profit, non-denominational, Christian-based relief organization, on three trips to Guatemala to aid in essential care for the indigenous people who would otherwise be an economic impossibility for them. The team treats all types of medical needs, but began noticing a reoccurring pattern of burn injuries and respiratory ailments caused by the open fires.



Nancy Hughes

"I began to realize that nearly 90 percent of the pediatric patients our team sees are burn patients or patients with lung

and skin disease," Hughes said.

On one of her trips to Guatemala, a young burn victim stood up to tell of her run-in with a "three-stone fire" and to thank the team for its help. At that moment Hughes decided that she must do something about this issue.

Her goal from that point on has been to prevent these health problems instead of treating them once they have already occurred.

The stoves that will replace the "three-stone fires" are made from cinder blocks and sit about three feet above ground, eliminating the possibility of falling in the fire. They are easy for the community members to put together and come with a chimney to direct the smoke out of the living space. The new stoves are extremely efficient, using 70 percent less firewood, which is helpful to the families who must buy the wood and also helps to conserve the local forests.

This year, Helps International received an Ashden Award, a "Green Oscar," for its innovative efforts to provide a sophisticated fuel-efficient stove to the homes of Guatemala's rural poor.

One Guatemalan woman who has already received a new stove raved about it and said she now has time to pursue hobbies like basket weaving.

To facilitate her vision, Hughes established a grant in memory of her husband, Duffy Hughes, a physician in Eugene for more than 25 years. The goal of this grant is to raise \$25,000 per year for the next four years to replace the "three-stone fires" in the homes of 8,000 indigenous Guatemalan families.

The grant is sponsored by Southtowne Rotary, and each donation gets multiplied eight fold. A \$100 donation gets doubled by the District 5110 Rotary Club, which gets doubled by Rotary International. That money, once in Guatemala, gets matched by Shell Oil. So, a \$100 donation grows to \$800 which would provide eight families with new stoves.

To help Hughes with her quest, you can send your contributions to: The Duffy Hughes Memorial Stove Grant, c/o Eugene Southtowne Rotary Foundation, PO Box 5158, Eugene 97405 — *E. Anderson Cael*