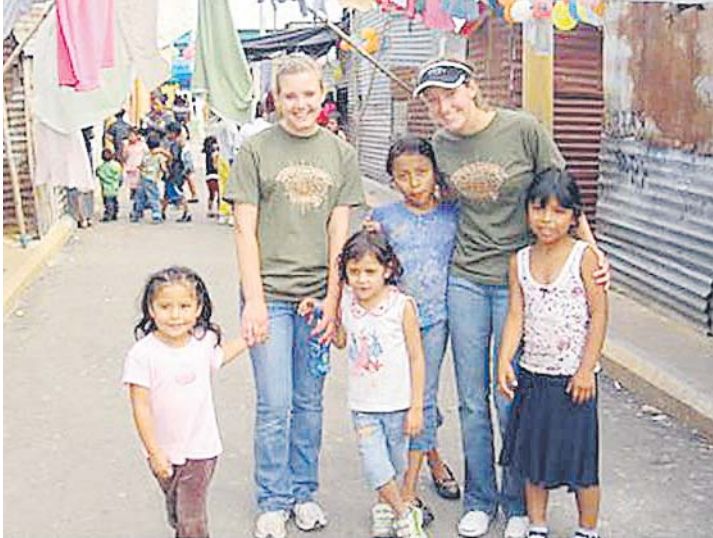


A Girl Scout Gold Award To Help in The Basurero

By Sophie Braccini



Jenna Pettegrew and Gaby Olufson with Guatemalan children Photo provided

The Guatemala City Dump, or “basurero,” covers 40 acres of land. It is the biggest land fill in Central America and the home to hundreds of families, poorest among the poor, who survive by scavenging what the trucks dump daily. That place is where two Campolindo students, Jenna Pettegrew and Gabby Olufson, decided to complete their Girl Scout Gold Award, building ovens and teaching kids basic fire safety in the Colonia del Recuerdo community next to the dump.

The two friends are part of the Lafayette/Orinda Presbyterian Church which helped in raising the necessary funds. “We knew we wanted to do something internationally and that would help children,” says Pettegrew, “so we talked to our church’s mission leader, John Weems, who gave us

the idea of the stoves.”

Families that live by and off the basurero are cramped in small houses in which open cooking fires create hazards and smoke. The incidence of deadly pulmonary disease is staggering among children. The new ventilated safe stoves installed by the Scouts will also reduce burn related injuries, and firewood consumption by 50-70%.

One of the girls’ challenges was to find the financing for the stoves. They addressed the Women Senior group at the Lafayette/Orinda Presbyterian Church, who provided financial support for the purchase of the stoves and mission team volunteers to assist the girls in completing their project.

There was something else the girls wanted to do: fire safety training for children. With the help of

the Contra Costa Fire Department, that provided educational materials and training, they created an education session in Spanish for the Guatemalan children. “We had games to teach them the stop-drop-and-roll rule, coloring papers and puzzles to learn to lay low when smoke is present.” Fire safety is of great concern in the dump, since 2005 when the cloud of methane gas that hovers over the dump ignited and caused a massive fire.

The girls left for Guatemala with their families on June 22nd and came home on July 2nd. Since their return, they have been making presentations to thank all those who helped them. Their church has decided to pursue their effort and continue providing stoves to Colonia del Recuerdo.

The trip had a profound impact on the two. “I had never seen such a level of poverty,” says Gaby, “they have so little and still the children are full of joy and love.” She particularly remembers a very young little girl who wouldn’t let go of her, who took her to her home and managed to find her again the next day to give her hugs. “I want to spend a year there in the future,” says Olufson, “maybe I will teach, all I know is that I want to help.” Pettegrew adds, “I had a terrible culture shock, especially coming back to the Bay Area.” The entering highschool juniors say they will definitely chose international study in college, “there is so much to do out there