

Hola Amigos...

We hope that this finds all of you well and in good spirits. We feel a change in the weather here. No rain here yet, but the clouds are appearing from the south. It won't be long before the dust is gone.

March has been a trying month for the medical volunteers. Some confusion among those that are working so hard to fill the volunteer calendar caused the positions to be over filled. This created tension among the volunteers who were here to work hard and see many patients. We are sorry that this situation occurred and hope that it never happens again.

Pediatricians Rob Meyer and Samantha were very busy. Rob took on the challenge to see the children from ADISA, the center for children with disabilities. He worked with Andrea Sojuel, ADISA's physical therapist, and they scheduled all of the projects children to come in for check-ups. It took most of two weeks to see them all. Education and prenatal care could have prevented many of the birth defects that they saw.

This is a great time of year to read Vicente Stanzione's book, "The Rituals of Sacrifice". Stanzione is an anthropologist who has lived and worked in Santiago Atitlán for decades. The book is about the ceremonies and customs in the village the weeks before Easter. Many of the customs have been forgotten in recent years, but many are still part of the village tradition. If you feel connected to the people of Atitlán, this book will help you understand their connection to the earth, the seasons, and the coming of the rains and crops.

Festival Atitlán, the annual fund-raising event to build the new hospital, was a huge success. There were wonderful activities for the children in the afternoon, and everyone enjoyed the great blue grass of Leroy Mack, who appeared on the Andy Griffith show and the film Oh Brother Where Art thou.

There continues to be confusion about the energy and money going into the construction of the new Hospitalito. Many see a huge construction project, while at the same time concerns about staffing and services at HA. It is true that some positions vacated by medical staff have not been filled, and that personnel are receiving low wages. Most all staff received raises to their monthly salary in January 2008. All Guatemalan employees receive 14 paychecks a year, two bonus checks in the months of June and December, and a months paid vacation. This year however, we have not been in a position to offer raises, and until the economy improves and donations increase, the staff here is in the same position as many in the world.

It is important that everyone understand that the funds donated for construction are kept in a separate account, and that donations to the general fund to support HA operations never go to construction. Thus far, the majority of money for construction has come from large donors, the Archdioceses of Oklahoma City and Starbucks, and many generous individuals who see the need for a proper permanent hospital for the community. An

anonymous woman philanthropist matches all donations, and the match is only for construction.

I hope that this information is helpful, and that it will calm some of the concerns about funds being diverted from operations to construction. Yes, there is an incredible amount of time and energy being spent by the K'aslimaal Board at the construction site in meetings with Engineers and the Architect. The decisions made now will affect HA for years to come, and we hope to make the correct ones. Please bear with us in this important planning phase. We hope to have this tedious work behind us by 2011, and be in the wonderful new hospital.

Thank you all for your volunteer time, your thoughts and your prayers for the success of Hospitalito Atitlán. Many wonderful people are making this happen!