

Guatemala Project

Fire Station / Water Ambulance / Clinic / Training Center

History and Proposal



HISTORY

Guatemala is the northernmost of the Central American countries, situated south of Mexico between the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.

Guatemala is about 2/3 the size of the state of Washington and has a population of almost thirteen million people. A majority of the population lives well below the poverty level.

Guatemala was devastated by bloody 36 year civil war that ended with the signing of a peace treaty between the guerillas and democratically elected government of President Alvaro Arzu in 1996. The country is now trying to recover and develop as a nation.

The Volunteer Firefighters of Guatemala (Cuerpo de Bomberos Voluntarios de Guatemala) are a dedicated group of individuals that provide fire suppression, public service, rescue operations, and emergency medical services to the citizens of this poor country.

They have 120 fire stations around the country and approximately 6,000 firefighters that perform their important services with limited equipment, supplies, and training.

Since 1996 the Bomberos have made great efforts to increase their ability to provide pre-hospital emergency medical care to the sick and injured in Guatemala.

They have established an Emergency Medical Technician Program and are teaching the firefighters medical skills required to reduce pain and suffering for the sick and injured and to provide transportation to hospitals for continuing care.

Lake Atitlan is one of Guatemala's largest lakes located in the mountainous Department of Solola, in the Guatemalan highlands about 150 kilometers (a three hour drive) from Guatemala City. It is approximately the size of Lake Tahoe and is surrounded by three 10,000 volcanoes.

Surrounding the lake you will find a dozen Mayan villages where life and customs have changed little over the centuries. Several of these rapidly growing villages are accessed only by boat.

There are no medical facilities along the lake to provide much needed medical care to the sick and injured in these villages.

The only hospital on the lake was shut down in 1990 following a military massacre of civilians in the largest village on the lake, Santiago Atitlan.

Since that time there has been many efforts to re-open the hospital with support of many individuals and LAMP (The Lake Atitlan Medical Project).

Unfortunately, the hospital was destroyed by a massive mudslide caused by the torrential rains of Hurricane Stan that devastated the region in November of 2005, once again leaving the lakeside communities with no medical services.

Santiago was hit extra hard and over 1200 people were buried by the mudslide. The village was declared a cemetery as it was too dangerous to attempt to recover all of the bodies.

Thousands were left homeless with all that they had destroyed.

There is a great need for medical services, rescue operations, and fire suppression services along the communities surrounding the lake.

On the shores of the west side of the lake lays the community of San Juan La Laguna. It is accessed by boat or by a long, steep, narrow, and windy road that connects with a major highway. There is road access to three other lakeside communities, San Pedro, San Pablo, and San Marcos.

It takes about two hours to drive from these communities to the nearest hospital in Solola, the capital of the region.

The community has recognized the needs for the services provided by the Bomberos and have provided a small room and the salaries for two full time firefighters that work seven days a week for twelve hours per day. (Their Salary is equivalent to about \$125.00 US dollars per month). The night shifts are covered by Volunteers from the community.

A faster transport option would be to pay for a boat to transport them across the lake to Panajachel, a large town on the east side of the lake where they can arrange ground transport to the hospital. Most people in the area do not have the financial resources to access this option.

The Alcalde (mayor) of San Juan, and the community leaders have committed to providing the salaries for two more full time firefighters but NO pay for the gasoline for patient transports on the ambulance.

The community has also donated the land that has both lake and road access to build a fire station and dock.



PROPOSAL

- 1) Build a fire station that will house an ambulance and fire engine and have kitchen and dormitory facilities for the firefighters. (Phase 1 of the project)
- 2) Build a dock on the lake near the fire station. (Part of Phase 1)
 - a. Obtain a boat that will be modified to become a water ambulance to transport sick and injured patients across the lake to Panajachel.
 - b. Firefighters in Panajachel have an ambulance that can then pick up the patient and transport them to the hospital in Solola.
 - c. This will reduce valuable transport time to less than one hour to the hospital.
 - d. The boat will also be used to provide rescue services on the lake for water related accidents.
- 3) Add a second story to the fire station that will include a clinic and a large training room.
 - a. The clinic will serve the community on a daily basis as the firefighters will be trained and equipped to provide basic first aid procedures to the citizens of the community.
 - b. The clinic can be used by Guatemalan doctors during their internships in rural medicine.
 - c. The clinic will be designed to be used by medical teams from the US and other countries that come to Guatemala to provide medical services.
 - d. The clinic will be equipped with a small surgical room that can be used for life saving operations by visiting doctors and teams.
 - e. The training room shall become the classroom for regional Emergency Medical Technician Courses.
 - f. Other specialized courses will also be taught to the firefighters including hazardous materials, technical rescue, and firefighting skills.
 - g. Dormitory facilities will be included to house the participants of courses and conferences as well as medical teams.(Phase 2 of the project)