

A Project Fair Can Lead to Amazing Outcomes

By Skip McCowan, Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary Club

Rotary is truly an amazing organization. I continue to learn about ordinary people doing extraordinary things to make life better for people around the world. In 2019, one of the doors Rotary International President Holger Knaack talks about opened for me. I attended the *Uniendo America* Project Fair in San Jose, Costa Rica. I had no idea what to expect when I boarded the plane for San Jose. I had no idea *Uniendo America* was more than twenty years old. I had no idea American Rotarians from all over the United States travel to Central America each year to attend the Fair. I had no idea these Rotarians develop strong relationships with Rotarians from each of the seven Central American countries.

I was determined to make the most of my attendance. And, while there, I committed to attend the 2020 Fair in Antigua, Guatemala. At both fairs I learned about scores of worthwhile projects that our District's clubs can bring to life, either with financial support, or with hands-on work.

But what I really want to share is how meeting just one person led to a significant enrichment of my Rotary experience. His name is Julio Grazioso. We met in San Jose in 2019, and we hit it off. He was the immediate Past District Governor of District 4250 and a member of the Vista Hermosa Club in Guatemala City. It was clear he knew just about everyone. He graciously invited me to lunch with a mix of Central and North American Rotarians. At the Antigua Fair in 2020, we spent time getting to know each other better.

This new friendship led to the following:

1. Julio put me in touch with Vista Hermosa member Carlos Rosales to discuss having my club, Lamorinda Sunrise, and theirs work together on a project. We had a Zoom call with members of both clubs. After introductions, we agreed to partner on their project to install concrete floors in the homes of residents in Tecpan, Guatemala. A World Bank study has shown that adding a concrete floor to a home, at a cost of only about \$1,000, reduces intestinal diseases by more than seventy percent, thereby improving the health and wellbeing of an entire family. We will apply for a District 5160 Matching Grant to partially fund this project.

If your club would like to learn more about how to join us, please email me at jackbmccowan@gmail.com.

2. I invited Julio and members of his club to join the Lamorinda Sunrise Zoom meeting last September to record a program that has two important purposes: 1) to demonstrate how to host a combined in-person and virtual club meeting, and 2) to provide COVID-19 lifesaving information from world-renowned health experts. The speakers included Dr. Anthony Fauci, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan of the World Health

Organization, Dr. Anita Zaidi of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, President Holger Knaack, and John Hewko, the General Secretary of Rotary International. Julio was impressed, and he now has the video to share with clubs in his district.



3. When Hurricane Eta, a Category 4 storm, struck Guatemala in early November 2020, Julio told me that his district was helping people affected. He sent me a powerful video that showed the devastation. I posted it on our club's website and Facebook page asking for donations. Assistant District Governor Cynthia Garcia acted quickly to put the video on the District's Facebook page to increase the reach of the campaign. The efforts paid off, and a generous donation was wired to District 4250 to help families who lost everything.

So, what are my takeaways from this short history spanning less than two years?

- **Take a chance on a new experience**, even if it is outside your comfort zone.
- **Don't just be an observer.** Get to know people who can make a difference in whatever you and your club want to do.
- **Stay in touch**, whether by phone or email, to nurture new relationships. You will be glad you did!

If I had not made the effort to get to know Julio, we would have missed the opportunities to work together to make the lives of Guatemalans better and to promote a new way for clubs to enrich their virtual meetings during, and beyond, the pandemic. And our friendship has energized my club's International Service Committee to improve and broaden our efforts abroad.