

Rotarians Donate School Supplies to Mexican Villages

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School started in Madera, Mexico, before Texas Rotarians could get to the town, but once they got there, the celebration started both in the local elementary and junior high schools and with the Madera Rotarians. The Texas group brought school supplies to the schools, providing much needed items to the students.

Among the Texas Rotarians were two Plainview Rotary members, president Scott Alford and Thad Bartley. "They had started school before we went down there in September," says Alford. "Madera is a very poor area and the students had very little in the way of supplies before we got there." Because of the hassle of getting the supplies over the border, Rotarians in District 5730 send money to Mexican Rotarians who purchase the supplies in Mexico. "When we got down there, we sorted and made packets that held a spiral notebook, pencils, erasers, rulers, to elementary students. We added a protractor in the junior high packet. "We gave out about 1,000 packages."

Alford noted that this is just one of Rotary's international missions. Several years ago, the Plainview Rotary Club participated in an effort to eradicate polio spearheaded locally by Dr. Mike Graves who now serves as an assistant district governor for Area 4. Ted Holder of the Levelland club currently serves as District 5730 governor-elect. "Ted speaks Spanish fluently," Alford explains the ease of communication between the Texas and Mexico clubs. "He goes to Mexico several times a year on various missions to Madera, Creel and Guerrero, to name a few."

Alford and Bartley traveled in a five car convoy leaving Texas through Juarez, then down South into Mexico. They traveled about 2,000 miles in total. "We had a great trip," Alford says. "The highways were excellent and we had a very good drive." Madera is close to Copper Canyon, a famous tourist destination in the Sierra Madres on the Continental Divide.

"We were able to drive out to take school supplies to the Tarahumara Indians, also. They live in a more isolated area and it was a rough ride out there," says Alford, smiling. "All of us went to the remote village and bought some of their baskets and things and left some school supplies," Bartley says. Both say what sticks in their memories about the entire trip was the satisfaction of sharing with the children.

"Handing out the school supplies definitely was the high point of the trip," Alford says. "The expressions on their faces when they got the school supplies was priceless. They are very poor there and don't have the basics. They have very little to work with." Bartley agrees. "Giving all those school supplies to the kids . . . it was a real heart-felt deal. They were proud to get them and we were proud to be able to help."

It wasn't just academic supplies. The Texans brought sports equipment for each of the Madera schools. "The boys particularly . . . well, all of the kids . . . lit up with that," Bartley says. "We took baseballs and catchers mitts, basketballs, soccer balls and footballs. You know, every kid likes to play with a ball and they were no different. They really were excited about the sports equipment." He adds that the Madera schools had basketball goals set up outside. "They didn't have nets, but they were goals where the kids had fun playing basketball. We left a big old duffel bag of stuff for both schools."

Alford, who has been a member of Plainview Rotary for about eight years, and Bartley, a five-year-member, agree that the scenery was breathtaking and the hospitality from Madera Rotarians was outstanding. "We were able to attend one of their meetings which also was a party for us. They cooked up fresh trout," says Bartley. "It was good stuff."

The Rotarians communicated through a translator and those who were bilingual. "I can speak some Spanish," Bartley says. "I could pick out some things here and there, enough to communicate. The whole trip was very nice." The two already are excited about a new international project started on the heels of the Polio Plus program..

"Hunger Plus was started right here in Plainview in our own club by J.B. Roberts. It is a project with the World Health Organization where we purchase dehydrated food prepared at the Breedlove plant in Lubbock and sent to third world countries. "The whole idea started right here with J.B. "He and his wife, Ramona, have been instrumental in getting our World Hunger project off and running," says Alford.

It's not surprising that local Rotarians live by the International creed: Service Above Self.