

A Global Grant Provides Composting Toilets in El Salvador

By Past President Tom Burson, Rotary Club of Mechanicsburg

The Rotary Clubs of Mechanicsburg (D-7390) and San Salvador Noroeste (D-4240) have all but completed a Rotary Global Grant project (GG 1420733) in El Salvador which provided 196 composting toilets and 100 cubic meters of water storage for the community of Metalillito.

The genesis of this project came in 2009 when a team from the Mechanicsburg club was drilling a water well. This led us to Metalillito. The community had a committee exploring their sanitation concerns and seeking solutions, and the team promised that it would help find a solution. After returning home, the team members, working with the club's water committee, proposed that the club help the community. The committee had several tasks: develop a sanitation solution, start raising funds, explore a Rotary Global Grant, and find a partner club in El Salvador. It turned out that raising the funds was the easiest part ... people could easily see the need and wanted to be part of the solution.

It took several months, but the committee developed a preliminary design based on World Health Organization designs. We found an engineer in El Salvador who, with the community, developed a practical design buildable from local materials. We also had a plan: 182 toilets were needed at a cost of over \$100,000.

Early on in our planning, we felt we should try for a Rotary Foundation Global Grant, but this was new to us and we had a lot to learn. To start with, we knew we needed a partner club in El Salvador. Finding one proved to be the most challenging thing we had to do. We worked on that most of 2012 and 2013 ... a long story, but critical to the project.

In the meantime, our club and the community were becoming frustrated by the lack of progress. The club sent \$5,000 to the engineer and asked him to build as many



prototype toilets as he could to demonstrate our commitment and to validate the design. He built seven in late 2013.

Finally, we found a partner club — San Salvador Noroeste — in January 2014 and then things moved quickly. The online Global Grant application was submitted in May 2014. The total value of the grant was \$123,888, with the club providing \$35,400; DDF accounting for \$35,400, and a World Fund “match” of \$53,088.

About one month after we filed the application, we received a lot of questions from Rotary. Most of them had to do with proving community need and determining that the composting toilets were the best solution. I think that having done the prototypes made a big difference. It took until December 2015 for the grant to be approved. We actually started work on the project in January 2015 and the toilets were finished in May with the number increased to 196 due to available funds and increased community need. Including the prototypes, a total of 203 toilets were constructed.

The toilet project had over \$20,000 remaining at this point and the host club and the community identified a need to build a large water storage tank (100 m³) to supplement their smaller one. Rotary approved this addition and the construction was completed in December 2015.

In late February 2016, a seven member team from Mechanicsburg visited the project and were welcomed by the community with a big celebration. All of the work accomplished to date looked fine and the community was very pleased. All that remains at this point is some of the hookups to the storage tank. Our club has been warmly welcomed by the Metalillito community and the host Rotary Club. We plan to continue to partner with them on future projects in El Salvador.

