

Massachusetts Rotarians Headed to Guatemala for WASH Mission

Volunteer effort seeks to provide water, sanitation and hygiene, prevent respiratory illness, and preserve the environment



When people in developing nations gain access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), many good things start to happen. Waterborne diseases decrease. Children stay healthier and attend school more regularly. And, parents spend less time carrying water and more time helping their families.

With this hopeful vision in mind, 21 Rotarians and non-Rotarians from Central Massachusetts and

Metrowest will soon be heading to the Lake Atitlán, Panajachel area of Guatemala. On March 21, they will journey to the Central American nation for a seven-day WASH mission.



Shown, on the left, posing with a resident of the Lake Atitlán area during last year's mission, is Steve Sager, of the [Rotary Club of Westborough](#), a past district governor and current chair of the Foundation Committee for [Rotary District 7910](#), which covers Central Mass. and Metrowest.

The WASH project is being funded by a \$318,000 Global Grant from [The Rotary Foundation](#). The grant money is being used to provide the following

improvements at 23 primary schools in nine Guatemalan communities: wash stations; adequate toilets; segregated bathrooms; comprehensive hygiene and menstrual education for both students and teachers; and safe water for drinking and for cooking school meals.

The service-above-self volunteers taking part in this year's Guatemala mission will help to provide water, sanitation and hygiene, prevent respiratory illness, and preserve the environment by doing the following:

- Working on the WASH project underway at the 23 primary schools. Shown, is the WASH project in action during the 2018 trip.
- Installing efficient [Onil wood-burning stoves](#) in homes in Mayan villages in collaboration with Guatemalan Rotarians and [HELPS International Inc.](#)
- Planting tule around the highly polluted Lake Atitlán, so the tall sedge, which grows in dense stands along freshwater wetlands, will help to save and restore the lake by filtering out its pollution.

Make the world a better place



The WASH project at the 23 primary schools in Guatemala is designed to invest in water and sanitation systems and provide comprehensive

hygiene and menstrual education. Those schools were selected due to their lack of access to adequate sanitation facilities.

Education in both hygiene and menstrual health is necessary because girls suffer more due to inadequate sanitation and privacy. The WASH project aims to improve sanitation services in a comprehensive and sustainable manner, including installing filters to make the water drinkable. The Rotary clubs participating in the WASH project have access to expertise and resources available through two of Rotary's areas of focus: [basic education and literacy](#); and [water and sanitation](#).

Since 2013, the Rotary Foundation has invested in more than 1,000 WASH projects in more than 100 countries. Through Foundation grants and fundraising by Rotary clubs, Rotary volunteers have supported water purification, hygiene education, latrine construction, and waste management throughout the world.

The WASH project in Guatemala is hosted by the [Rotary Club of Nueva Guatemala](#), with participation from Rotary clubs and districts across the United States and Canada. The project is being carried out in collaboration with four Guatemalan organizations: [Fundación Castillo Córdova](#); [Asociación Pro Agua del Pueblo](#); [Municipalidad de Zacalpa](#); and [Ecofiltro S.A.](#)

“Working on international service projects like this is one of the best aspects of belonging to Rotary,” says Steve Sager, who was on two prior Guatemala projects, including last year’s trip, and will be on this year’s mission. “We come to help communities that seem disadvantaged by our standards, but we end up helping ourselves, making lifelong friends, and doing our part to make the world a better place.”

Out with the old, in with the new



During this year’s Guatemala mission, Rotary volunteers will continue working on a prior Rotary Foundation Global Grant, executed last year, which involves the reduction of respiratory diseases by installing Onil stoves in Mayan communities, where cooking is typically done on open wood-burning fires in homes. Volunteers will also be involved in the tule plantings.

Shown, third from the left, is Dave Kaiser, of the Rotary Club of Westborough, and a Guatemalan family posing with one of the Onil stoves installed during the 2019 trip. Kaiser will also be on this year’s mission.

In March 2019, 15 Rotarians from Central Mass. and Metrowest, many of whom will be going again on this year’s trip, traveled to the Lake Atitlán area. Of the 183 Onil stoves funded by the Global Grant, the volunteers installed more than 100 in homes of three rural villages around Panajachel.

They also established a committee to monitor and improve the respiratory health of the communities where the Onil stoves were installed. Unlike either open fires or the old stoves that a few families already had, the Onil stoves are vented outside of the

residence and reduce exposure to carbon monoxide and particulate matter. They also reduce greatly the risk of children getting burned.

The Onil-stoves project was funded by a Rotary International Global Grant with the participation of Rotary District 7910 and [Rotary District 4250](#) (Rotary clubs in Guatemala).

“Seeing how much the families appreciate our help and knowing that it will change their lives so much makes it all worth it,” says Ray Pfau, of the [Rotary Club of Nashoba Valley](#), who this year will be on his third trip to the Lake Atitlán area.

Making a significant improvement in quality of life



For Past District Governor Dick Manelis, of the [Rotary Club of Framingham](#), this will be his fourth trip to the Lake Atitlán region. His first mission was building homes with Habitat for Humanity, his second was installing water-purification systems with the local organization Worthy Village, and his third was installing Onil stoves.

“The people in the villages around the lake are friendly, industrious and most appreciative of our efforts,” says Manelis, shown, on the left, with Pfau during the 2018 trip. “Our projects make a significant improvement in their quality of life.”

Manelis’ favorite part of each trip is handing out stuffed animals to children who never had a toy. “Seeing them grasp the animals to their chest and beam with happiness,” he says, “makes each trip worthwhile.”

*For **more information** on the Guatemalan WASH mission, contact Past District Governor **Steve Sager**, chair of the District Foundation Committee, at ssager@sagerlegal.com.*

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