

Neepawa Rotary Club meeting joined by Guatemala members

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NEEPAWA BANNER & PRESS

The Neepawa Rotary club has hosted international guests for the second time in the span of a month. A pair of club members from Guatemala joined their Zoom meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 24, after a British Rotary member had spoken to the club only four weeks prior. Beatriz Aguilar and Selina Mejicanos, from Club Rotario Guatemala Norte, gave the Neepawa group an update on how their projects have been coming and how COVID-19 has affected their country.

Aguilar and Mejicanos, as well as their club, had a previous connection to Neepawa Rotary. Ron Nordstrom, one of the Neepawa members, was part of a six person team that went to Guatemala in 2017 as part of a Vocational Training Team. He was there for four weeks, working with teachers and students in a village called Joya Verde and the Guatemala Norte club hosted his team while they were there.

Helping development in a rural village

The Guatemala Norte club has been working in Joya Verde for about 12 years, starting with building new washrooms and moving onto the school and a number of other projects. Aguilar noted that they were able to start projects in Joya Verde because of an initial \$1,000 grant from a Canadian Rotary club.

Some of the projects Guatemala Norte has been able to do in Joya Verde, with support from Rotary programs and donations from Canadian and American clubs, included

building a new school, constructing a water treatment plant, helping locals build bathrooms for each housing lot, and providing continued support to the locals with training and kids' recreational programs.

Aguilar noted that the bathroom units are the current project they've been working on. So far, they've built around 55 units, with 52 more needed to supply one to every household that has connection to the sewage system. "We're very happy that we're getting ahead in this project," Aguilar expressed. "We really have to give a big thank-you to you [at the Neepawa Rotary Club], because without your help, we really couldn't do a fraction of what we're able to do with all your support."

While the club has been making steady progress in the village of Joya Verde, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a lot of challenges to the whole country. Mejicanos explained that most schools have closed due to COVID-19. The majority of the cities are in tighter lockdown, where the schools have to close, but in the rural areas where schools are allowed to be partially open, many don't have the facilities needed to allow safe in-class learning, so they are closed anyway, with distance learning options in place. Mejicanos added that the economy as a whole has suffered, with an estimate that it will take until 2022 to recover to the state it was in pre-pandemic.

Despite COVID-19's challenges, the Guatemala Norte club has been able to continue their work in Joya Verde, as many rural villages have been fortunate enough to have little exposure to the virus. The country as a whole, however, is just waiting until vaccinations come so they can start getting back to normal.