

Happy holidays our dear Friends of the Fund,

and from John *Merry Christmas you Chillin Blessees :*

12-2009

It is hard to believe that this December brings the one-year anniversary of the loss of our dear friend John. It seems like he was just calling to update us on how the packing was going for the annual Christmas shipment to Honduras. He is so dearly missed. Thankfully, his spirit is still very much alive in the programs that he dedicated his life to. In January, Bless the Children, Inc. and several of John's dear friends and family joined forces, establishing the John Grove Memorial Fund to continue John's commitments to children in the Mico Quemado Mountains. His deep desire to help free them from desperate poverty, provide valuable material aid as well as help educate them so they could create a worthwhile future for themselves and their families is still providing daily miracles to the poor.

Material Aid: With the Herculean efforts of volunteers in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, seven 40 foot sea container loads of John's collected humanitarian aid were shipped; 5 to Honduras, and 1 each to both Jamaica and Guyana. Beginning with almost 30 storage units that John left behind, packed full of medical and school supplies, construction materials, toys, clothing and bikes, dedicated volunteers - headed up by Dave Freeman and Steve Connelly - organized, inventoried, crated and shipped the most needed items. Some items were sold and funds went to the John Grove Memorial Fund.

Providing these basic necessities is so very appreciated by families trying to escape poverty. It is especially needed in Honduras, amid the political turmoil and recent hurricane Ida. Anyone who knew John knew he was dedicated to the environment and the poor; he dedicated so much of his life collecting things of use. A huge team effort made it possible to complete his efforts to get these things to the poor with the McCroskie Threshold Foundation playing a major role in fulfilling this dream.



Unloading and delivery in Honduras



Education: Thanks to your investment in this community, together we were able to save The John Grove High School and continue to offer ways in which the children can benefit. (Please note the poster hanging in the children's classroom! – photo on right)



HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

At the close of this school year, **SEVENTEEN** students moved up a grade and **FIVE** students graduated from the John Grove High School. This is a stellar accomplishment for the children of the mountains, Bless the Children and the John Grove Fund. We have all given these children a miracle.



(Note: All of John's students now have shirts bearing the name John Grove Academy; he spoke often of wanting this for them.)

Our director, George Mealer, retired US Military, wrote us of the graduation celebration that Bless the Children gave to the children. He said, "The graduation ceremony and celebration was a great success, Channel 48 was there covering the event. We held it at the La Casona Restaurant [owned by George and Betty Mealer] to save on the cost. Everybody had a good time. It went from 11 AM to 4 PM. We served barbeque chicken, Chinese rice, beans, salad and bread. About 30 guests came and the 5 graduates. The speaker was a retired judge who has property in the mountain and knew all the people up there. He spoke about the importance of higher education among the young people from the mountain and for them to not immigrate from their community and serve their fellow people. He also said that all the communities in this mountain should be appreciative of Bless the Children as an institution helping the people of the mountain get out of poverty. His name is Attorney Mario Caballero and he served for 4 years as a criminal judge for the department of Yoro."

(Note: Oftentimes in Honduras it can take more than one year for a student to move up a grade because they are needed to work to help support their families.)

John's students have also been busy this year taking courses at the Bless the Children Computer and English Language Lab. John had a large hand in this Lab being established by helping another of our partners, I Want to Learn English, ship all the necessary computer equipment to Honduras. This year John's kids were sponsored by donors to travel by pickup truck way down the mountains, twice each week, into the small town of El Progreso to take both English and computer training courses. John's kids raised the funds to pay for a computer training teacher by having mini bazaars with items John collected and were sent by containers.

TWENTY students have completed the 1st level of the English Learning Computer Course (Rosetta Stone) and **TWENTY-THREE** have finished the Introduction to Microsoft Basics Training Course!!!!

The students have even taken their learning out of the classroom and into a garden that they planted. Without the educational experiences provided by the school, these students would not be challenged to have higher expectations for their community and quite possibly, for themselves.



Many of the John Grove High School Students

Students of the John Grove High School Give Thanks



Dilcia Avila

For me it's very important that this high school exists because we are very poor and don't have enough money to be able to pay for high school [in the city of El Progreso]. We don't have the possibility to go all the way down the mountain to go to school and we don't have any money to pay. I really like to go to high school because that makes it possible for me to reach my goals. My dream is to study office administration and this gives me opportunities.

Now my family has a difficult situation, we are many brothers and sisters and my father doesn't have much money. Now we are three that are studying in this high school which is very good. In the future I want to make a business to make money to be able to give a better future for my family because now we are very poor and it's difficult for my parents.

Bless the Children and John Grove are like a blessing for all us here. They give us opportunities we would never have been able to have. I am so grateful. Thank you very much and I want to continue to fight to get forward.



Wilson Omar Avila Maldonado

Three days I go to school and the other days I work on the coffee plantation. At John Grove I have the opportunity to learn different things. I couldn't afford to go to other schools and it is very difficult to travel up and down this steep mountain. I want to say a big thank you to everyone who has invested in our future.

Wilmer Alonso Avila Maldonado

John Grove High School is very important. It is the first high school in the mountains and if it wasn't here I wouldn't have the money or time to go and study elsewhere.

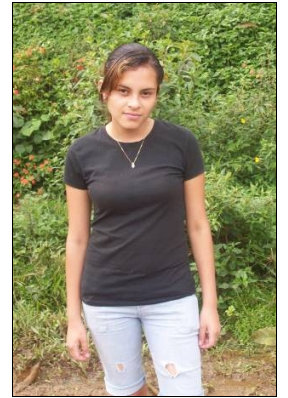
My favorite subjects are English and Science. I would really like to improve my English so that I could communicate with all the people that help us and come to visit us. My dream is to become a lawyer. I would like to say a big thank you to everyone involved in the John Grove High School and Bless the Children and I hope they carry on doing the great job of helping us.



Sandy Yadira Aguilera Calderon

If John Grove wasn't here I wouldn't go to school. I love going to school. I enjoy learning new things and spending time with friends. My favorite subject is Science. I love plants. My other passion is clothes and one day I hope to work in a clothes shop. Here I get taught Math and without knowing how to do Math I probably wouldn't be able to work in a shop.

Both me and my brother come to the John Grove School and we realize that is a great privilege as my parents never had an opportunity like this. They never had an education.



New Garden at the High School: During a Bless the Children Medical Mission Trip, one of our partners, the Church of the Epiphany of Richmond, VA donated funds to provide gardening tools to the children of The John Grove High School. The children worked very hard to clear the land, build a wire fence and plant seeds. Their garden is doing very well and will soon complement the Bless the Children Feeding Program so their nutritional needs are met with fresh produce. This garden is yet another one of John's dreams come true! Often he talked excitedly about how much this would help his kids!



Clearing the Land!



The New Gardening Tools and THE NEW GARDEN!

The High School Gets a Paint Job! Also during the Bless the Children Medical Mission Trip, the Church of the Epiphany donated funds for paint and brushes so the children could paint their school. The students chose the color themselves! The children had a great time working with the Epiphany Team and felt so much pride in their newly painted school and cleaned grounds.



The High School Receives New Desks: Earlier this year Bless the Children shipped a 40 foot sea container filled with desks to serve the poor schools in the area. The High School teacher came to our warehouse and picked out desks and then we delivered them to the school. You can see in these photos the High School students carrying their desks up the steep hill to their school in the mountains.



Trade School: Bless the Children and The John Grove Fund work continuously to ensure the continued success and ultimate self-sufficiency of our students. After two years of hard work, two John Grove High School graduates have now received their diplomas from cosmetology school! John donated the funds for their first year of school and was excited they would be provided with the skills of a trade to help provide for their families. Through the Fund, his friends and family made it possible for them to graduate and fulfill their dream, and John's, of higher education.

As these girls bring commerce into their community, they will help the area become more prosperous as well as help their families. Over this coming year, we will attempt to increase the number of trade scholarships to the students. One educated student can lift an entire family out of poverty. One by one, we hope to provide John's students with more trades for liberation from poverty. We are making impossible dreams come true; never before in the history of this mountain range have 2 young ladies had the opportunity to attend high school in the mountains and go on to earn a degree.



Dunia Aracely Mejia Chavez (at left in photos) Alma Gricelda Calderón (at right in photos)

Alma and Dunia were both top of their class for the full two years. When hearing of their first year success John was so proud and commented, "They're poor and from the mountains. They have to work harder than everyone else." The children from the mountains know they must make the very best of every opportunity to create positive change in their lives and for their communities.

(Note: A sponsorship to send one of John's girls to cosmetology school is \$35 per month for 2 years.)

Computer/Language Lab: Imagine seeing your children graduate from a computer and English learning course when you yourself live in a shack with dirt floors and don't even have electricity. This graduation was a milestone event in the Mico Quemado Mountains. Members of the community were ecstatic to attend this ceremony acknowledging the efforts of their children.



Note: A very special thank you goes to George Mealer, Bless the Children's program director in Honduras and retired US Army, for his tireless commitment to make possible all of Bless the Children's programs; and for making sure that John's spirit lives strong in all he set out to do to help the poor.



One of the most beautiful aspects of the Fund's development is the collective support of all our contributors. With each donation, you make the Fund the success that it is. From California to New York, each one of you is collaborating over thousands of miles to improve the lives on one rural Honduran mountain range. We thank you for all of the good you are doing in this world. Your one-time, multiple or monthly donations bring miracles incomparable to what one may imagine. Every donation brings not only education to these children but hope to entire communities that one day their children will not go hungry, their classrooms will continue to operate and that one day they may be able to walk with pride from having escaped the indignities of poverty.

As this is the season for giving, we'd like to welcome you to celebrate the holiday season with a gift for the children and to ask that you welcome the New Year with the resolution to continue to help lift these children from poverty. Throughout this great nation so many are financially stressed and we hope you and yours are surviving well. We understand this can be a difficult time and want to remind you that every donation, no matter its size, goes far in creating durable, lasting change.

Education is one investment that will never be lost on these children and will in fact do much to continue the dreams we all have that the world will become a more peaceful, compassionate and fair landscape for children to grow and prosper. The gift you give will affect many and continue to bless these children for years to come.

As John would often say, "Keep blessin' them dang chillin's!"



Donations can be made to the fund online by going to www.blessthechildreninc.org or by mail to The John Grove Memorial Fund ~ Bless the Children, Inc., 411 Cleveland St., #195, Clearwater, FL 33755. Please note "John Grove Memorial Fund" with your donation.

This coming year we plan to send out a newsletter by email. Please send your email address to Rebecca at Rebecca@blessthechildreninc.org so you may be added to the list. We often receive photos and updates from our director in Honduras and would like to share with you the successes you are helping make possible.

From the bottom of our hearts we thank you for keeping this dream alive. It is sad that a lifetime can be so short, but together we can build upon the efforts of this one, quietly noble man, and bring lasting change to the lives of so many. Through all the generations that have lived and died on these mountains it is an honor to know that together we are helping to create positive change for this one through education. Thank you for being a part of this work. You are so very important to this organization and to us personally. Together we are making a difference for vulnerable children.

Towards Peace on Earth,

Rebecca Smith

Rebecca Smith

Bless the Children, Inc.

Heather Grove

Heather Grove

Granddaughter of John Grove

*Thanks for the
chillin Blessin
OEFM*

"Our OEFM - The One-eyed Fat Man"



GUS' CORONA CAFE'
INVITES YOU TO TRY OUR
**JOHN GROVE
RED BEAN SOUP**

LARGE  **SMALL**



John received yet another honor this year! Many of you may have gotten calls during the dinner hour to hear that John was sitting down "to some sweet iced tea and red bean soup". He absolutely loved this stuff.

Now, everyone who visits one of John's favorite haunts, Gus' Corona Café, can order their very own "John Grove Red Bean Soup"!