



## SPOTLIGHT ON AOA MEMBERS

# Oregon OD's program provides sustainable opportunity in Guatemala



**On one of his trips to Guatemala, Scott Pike, O.D., hugs Sister Maria Christina, head of the Catholic sisters' clinic in the town of Cantabal. Photo by L.E. Baskow**

For more than a dozen years, the Ixcán region of Guatemala has welcomed Pacific University College of Optometry professor Scott Pike, O.D., and his crew as they strive to improve access to eye care in the remote area.

Dr. Pike's project, Enfoque Ixcán, has a mission to make vision and eye health care and eye health education available to the Ixcán people and believes the most effective method of providing eye health and vision care is to maximize the use of local and regional resources by educating and training local residents.

"The Ixcán region of Guatemala is quite remote, underdeveloped and ignored in regards to health and eye care services," said Dr. Pike. "Approximately 100,000 mostly indigenous Mayan people live in this region and must travel an uncomfortable four to seven hours to reach

basic eye care."

Enfoque Ixcán now has two trained eye health promoters in the area and recently received a \$13,850 grant that will allow them to add another eye health promoter and provide an inventory of eyeglasses and other supplies.

The grant will also help create materials educating the students and adults of the Ixcán about vision, eye health and the importance of preventive care.

"The ability to offer locally provided care from the health promoters and health professionals gives this project sustainability and an economic opportunity to the region," said Dr. Pike. "This defines our uniqueness as a mission project."

For the past six years, Dr. Pike has made a second annual journey to the region with a group of optometry students from Pacific University College of Optometry's Amigos Eye Care (affiliated

with Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity).

"On these mission trips, we examine hundreds of patients, dispense glasses, use the opportunity to teach the eye health promoters and identify patients needing professional care," said Dr. Pike.

Enfoque Ixcán established a relationship with an eye clinic in Guatemala City to which they send patients for eye surgeries.

"This clinic does social service work, enabling us to send patients there for care very affordably," said Dr. Pike. "Enfoque Ixcán pays for the surgeries and about 85 percent of the travel, food and lodging. As an example, one patient receiving two cataract surgeries will cost us under \$300."

Many of the patients helped by Enfoque Ixcán are extremely grateful for the eye care they receive.

One such patient is Manuel de Jesus Garcia, an 81-year-old man who has lived in the Ixcán village of San Pablo for 25 years.

He has a *parcela* (farmland) where his family grows crops, mainly for their own consumption, but when he has extra, he takes it to town

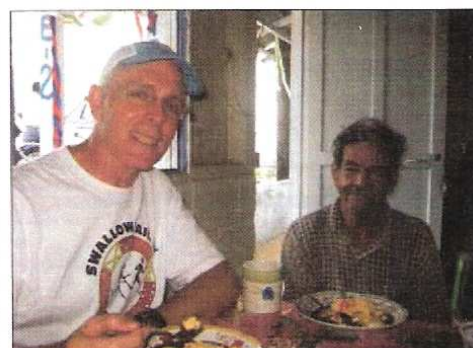
to sell.

"He was quite excited on the morning we met over a typical breakfast of eggs and beans and an oatmeal drink at Tita's *comedor* because beans were selling for 33 cents a pound," said Dr. Pike. "He had a freshly picked bag with him to sell after breakfast."

Before his cataract sur-

Pacific University, though he was unable to receive treatment at that time.

"So in February 2007, he came to see me while I was 10 miles away in the village of our eye health promoters, Felipe and Pedro," said Dr. Pike. "Others had told him that during the cataract surgery they would remove his



**Dr. Pike shares a typical Guatemalan breakfast of eggs and beans and an oatmeal drink with patient Manuel de Jesus Garcia.**

geries de Jesus Garcia described his vision like "looking at smoke and very blurry."

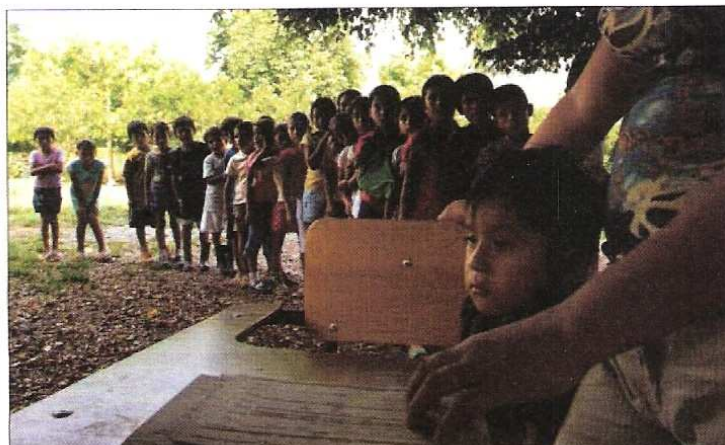
He heard about the work of Enfoque Ixcán when the group was there in 2006 with Amigos Eye Care from

eyes to work on them. That concerned him. We checked his eyes to be certain his problem was cataracts, and then had him talk to a previous patient who had under-

see *Enfoque Ixcán*, page 16

### Editor's note

AOA News is highlighting the admirable charitable work and exceptional patient care that distinguishes members of the American Optometric Association. Got a story to share? Drop a line to [RAFoster@aoa.org](mailto:RAFoster@aoa.org).



**A line of primary school students in the village of Santa Maria Dolores wait to have their acuities checked by volunteers from Enfoque Ixcán. Photo by L.E. Baskow**

# Enfoque Ixcán,

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Patients wait to be seen at a Catholic sisters' clinic in the town of Cantabal. Photo by L.E. Baskow



Fourth-year Pacific University College of Optometry student Nina Nemetz examines a patient during an Amigos Eye Care visit. Photo by L.E. Baskow

gone the surgery a year earlier. This allayed his fears of eye removal.”

After discussing it with his family, de Jesus Garcia decided to have the surgeries.

Afterward, he was happy that he could harvest his beans and go to the market on his own and also to be able to see his children more clearly.

Dr. Pike recounts, “As Manuel started on his way to the market to sell his beans, he looked back with a grin and

said, ‘I’ll help correct the rumors about the doctors taking peoples’ eyeballs out!’”

Dr. Pike will set out for Guatemala again on Feb. 6 for two weeks of training eye health promoters.

“Each day I am reminded of my good fortune living a middle-class life in the United States,” said Dr. Pike. “Our neighbors in the Ixcán are not so fortunate. Most live without electricity, running water or modern sanitation in a remote

and ignored jungle region of Guatemala. Over the years, I’ve come to realize that an important difference between their lives and mine is opportunity. By improving their access to year-round affordable eye care we are able to improve the quality of their lives, their educational opportunities and their dignity and self-worth.”

To learn more about the program, visit [www.eiguatemala.org](http://www.eiguatemala.org).



Dr. Rolando Cabrera, an optometrist from Guatemala City who works with Enfoque Ixcán, examines a child. Dr. Cabrera assists Dr. Pike with training the program’s eye health promoters. Photo by L.E. Baskow