

A Summer of Life Lessons – Student Social Entrepreneurship Program

Storrs, CT (11/3/2008) - Student social entrepreneurs delighted a full house as they recounted their experiences in Guatemala through the summer UConn Social Entrepreneurship Program at the Social Entrepreneurship Symposium held at the School of Business on October 6th.

The program was sponsored by UConn's Study Abroad office, the School of Business, and the Honors Program in consultation with the Spanish section of the Department of Modern and Classical Languages, and led by **Professor Linda Klein, associate dean of the School of Business.**

"The program is part of our goal to give our students broader exposure to world issues," says Dr. Klein. "I believe it's important for School of Business students to understand the positive impact of business on people's lives."

Participating students provided an overview of the program structure and objectives as well as a first hand perspective about the Guatemalan people, culture, and economy.

"It was a life-changing experience," says **Max Chanoch**, who is majoring in business management. "You learn about culture and a lot about people and how they live."

During the first two weeks of the internship, students resided with local families in Antigua. They engaged daily in four hours of intensive Spanish instruction coupled with afternoon development discussions regarding the initiatives that they would be actively promoting. Students were then divided into four groups, each focusing on a different initiative, and travel the Guatemalan countryside for the next six weeks visiting various cities including Nebaj, Solola, Quetzaltenango, and Coban.

One of the initiatives, *Empresario Rural*, was a bi-monthly publication providing information to local Guatemalan entrepreneurs about how to start, run, and grow a business. This publication was created, promoted, and made sustainable by these student social entrepreneurs who gained firsthand knowledge of how to develop a distribution system for the publication, gauge its utility and success through direct feedback, and establish adequate reach to insure that those most in need received the essential information.

Other initiatives included ParaLaComunidad.com, a website providing profile pages for local organizations to generate awareness and shared knowledge, and Soluciones Comunitarias, wherein micro-franchising kiosks promoted general welfare initiatives such as proper eye care, proper water filtration, and energy efficient light bulbs to native Guatemalans in non-traditional locations.

At the end of their Guatemalan experiential learning experience, UConn social entrepreneurs were given one final project: \$400.00 USD to donate to whatever initiative they selected. Students were inundated with a dirge of potential candidates, but wisely established criteria that would maximize the impact of the donation on a social and economic level.

The two organizations selected were the Wood Stove Project and Centro Explorativo, an after school program for children ages 5 to 12.

The Wood Stove Project provides wood stoves at a reduced price to families who up to this point have been using an open cooking pit carved into the floor. This program helps Guatemalans on so many levels, but most



notably in providing a cleaner and healthier breathing environment for those most at risk - children. Students noted that the highest cause of death for children under five in Guatemala is acute respiratory ailment. These wood stoves directly pipe the cooking smoke out of the home rather than allow it to permeate all interior surfaces as it does from the cooking pit. Through this initiative, burn incidences declined and jobs were created as masons were required to install these mechanisms.

Centro Explorativo provided after school care for children ages 5 to 12 enabling mothers and fathers to remain at work for a whole day and increase their overall productivity. The donated funds were earmarked for the purchase of books geared to children ages 10 to 12 as the center was woefully without these materials.

All of the students who participated in this Social Entrepreneurship Program and presented at the Symposium were clearly changed for the better in life - bearing the imprint of social entrepreneurship upon their hearts and minds.

"Each generation makes its own contribution, building on what was done by the previous generation. The most important of these contributions is the freedom and opportunity we inherited," said **Ed Satell '57**, who provided the endowment making this program possible. Satell expressed his pride and admiration for these students who had, "the opportunity to contribute in their own way to make this world a better place."

PHOTO: UConn business student Jon Beery addresses the audience about his summer experience in Guatemala.