



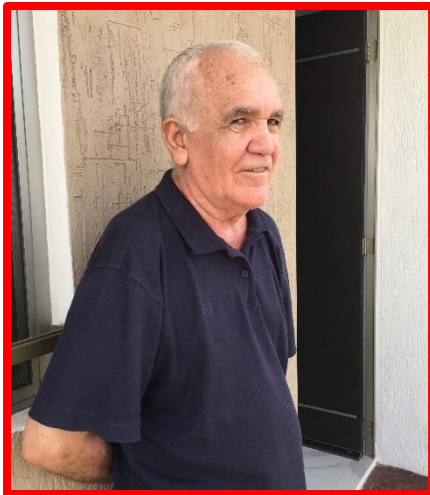
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June 2021

Dear Friends,

After a 15-month pause in our ability to travel to Mexico, Larry Lewis and I, Greg Mihalevich, got to see Luis Franco's smiling face in-person again on June 4, 2021. As most of you know, Luis is the foundation's sole employee who buys all the food and delivers it to our nutrition sites (mostly schools) in villages surrounding Merida to feed some 600 children one good meal every school day. No small task. Without Luis this would not be possible. Luis also drives us to the villages to distribute glasses, serves as our interpreter, is the foundation's unofficial historian, and keeps us entertained with his excellent sense of humor.



The board sent Larry and me to Merida with three main goals of delivering Luis's new debit card to him (rather than trying to mail it), buying a replacement vehicle, and hiring someone to help with the distribution of food.

The trip started a little slow with a late airline departure from St. Louis and a missed connection in Houston. Fortunately, there was a second flight to Merida that day and after spending 7 hours in the Houston airport we finally checked into our hotel at the stroke of midnight. It didn't take us long to fall asleep and at 7:00 the next morning we were sharing breakfast (which included plenty of coffee) with Luis at the hotel and discussing the plan for the day.

Mark Saucier, the board president, had been communicating with Luis about a replacement for his 2006 Honda CRV for several months and they had agreed that a five to seven-year-old used SUV would suit our needs and be in our price range. Luis had already heard about a one-owner 2014 Honda CRV through his mechanic and had arranged for us to see it that first morning after breakfast. On our way

over to check it out we stopped at two other used car lots to get a feel for the market in Merida. We met the owner of the CRV at the mechanic's shop and went for a test drive. The vehicle was in excellent condition and had 76,600 miles on it. Luis, Larry and I all agreed that the car was a good one and Luis negotiated the owner down to a price of \$10,650 USD cash. We had expected to spend several days car shopping, but in less than 12 hours after getting to town we had accomplished one of our major objectives. By the end of the day the title was transferred, insurance bought, and we were the proud owners of a "new" car.



We didn't take any glasses with us this trip. On our last trip we spent our final day giving out glasses in the village of Bokoba and promised them we would start there next time. When Luis contacted the mayor, he asked that we not come as the COVID code in Yucatan was yellow and he didn't want to attract a crowd. In fact, everyone was wearing masks indoors and out. When entering a business your temperature was taken and hand sanitizer was applied and there was a foot tray you walked through to disinfect your shoes just inside the door. With daily high temperatures in the upper 90s and a heat index of 105+ we were more worried about heat stroke than about COVID.



Our current nutrition sites are at Petectunich, Telchaquillo, Xcanchakan, Pixyah, Yaxkukul, Emmanuel, Escuela Hogar and Sabacchi. We have been wanting to expand the nutrition program and we realized that it would become more work than one person could handle. We needed to find some help for Luis. He had been contacted by the schools in Ekmul stating their interest in joining our program when school starts again this September. They have about 85 kids in kindergarten and about 250 kids in elementary school. That would put the total number of kids in the nutrition program close to 1,000. Larry and I talked to Sandro Castro, Genny's brother, about working for the foundation and he was interested. Larry emphasized that we did not want to keep him from pursuing his career as a veterinarian. We talked about the roles that he and Luis would have once we officially hired him to help with the food distribution beginning this fall. We settled on a starting salary and are thrilled to have Sandro officially part of the team.

On June 5th Luis, Sandro, Larry and I met with Seidy Gutierrez, a nutritionist that Sandro recommended, and we told her about our current program and asked her to provide us with any changes she would

recommend. We told her we want to get the best, most nutritious meals we can afford to the most kids possible.

Three days later Seidy and another nutritionist colleague of hers presented us with a written menu proposal for the kindergarteners. Their proposal was pretty well in line with our current menu but changing the type of cheese and bread we buy and the addition of more fruit. The two of them also went with us to Xcanchakan and Pixyah and they talked with the school principals about their proposal. They also want to speak to as many parents and teachers as possible to highlight the changing nutritional needs kids have as they grow. We plan to have menus ready for all age groups ready by the time school starts again.



One evening we were honored to be invited to have supper at Genny Castro's new house. As Dorothy and Rudy's "adopted granddaughter" they would have been proud of, but not surprised at, how her hard work as a fashion designer and seamstress has blossomed. Although less than 800 square feet, her house is home, sewing room, fitting room, and sales shop all under one roof. Her roof. She finally has a permanent home and does not have to move every time a landlord wants to sell the place she's living in.

The Merida Foundation is striving to follow Dorothy Lemke's example of doing what needs to be done to improve the lives of the people in Yucatan. These included possibly providing/upgrading computers and internet access for the schools as well as other tools or equipment that the schools might need to improve the learning potential for the students. We occasionally provide grants for special school projects and scholarships for students going to college or trade school. Just this month we agreed to give the school at Xcanchakan \$300 USD to do tree trimming on a tree that was damaging the wall surrounding the school. In the past we have bought refrigerators and stoves for schools. If you are interested in sponsoring any of these projects, please let us know.

Thank you,

Greg Mihalevich for the Merida Foundation

Founders: Dorothy and Rudy Lemke



Board Members: Mark Saucier, Anne Durbin Scott, Larry Lewis, Patricia Joyce, & Greg Mihalevich

Locations of Merida Foundation's nine nutrition sites. When school starts this fall we will be feeding almost 1,000 children a good meal every school day.

