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1959 - 2009



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1959 - 2009 Alumni Mass & Awards Ceremony

"Once a Cardinal, Always a Cardinal"

**Benjamin Williams, Humanitarian Alumni of the Year
Award Ceremony - Thursday, May 27, 2009**



Vern and MaryJo Williams, accepting the award on Ben's behalf

This year's honoree for the Humanitarian Alumnus of the Year Award is Ben Williams. This award is given to the Alumnus who as a result of a particularly generous, selfless and/or altruistic event (or series of events) in their life has profoundly affected the lives of others to the betterment of the community and/or the world at large.

Ben graduated from San Roque Grade School, then attended Bishop High from '93-'97. He went on to UC Berkeley, graduating in 2001 with a degree in English. Ben was working in San Francisco as a paralegal in a prominent law firm making big bucks and gave it all up when he decided to join the Peace Corps in 2007, making \$9/day in El Salvador.

He kept in touch through the Internet, telling of his experiences in the

small village of El Pital. Ben wrote of his time there with colorful descriptions and imagination, with photos that made you feel like you were living the life with him!

He persevered through trial and error, learning their long-standing customs and traditions. Ben was instrumental in the success of the local teens becoming more self-sufficient with a greeting card business. Fifteen motivated teens painted colorful scenes on their own greeting cards, using the only paint they had access to...5 colors of house paint...black, white, red, yellow and blue. The cards were sold here in Santa Barbara and the money raised was used for many things. There were field trips, exposing the youths to more of their world, savings accounts for the future, buying supplies and also making food baskets for the poorest of the poor.

Most of the children of El Pital do not stay in school past 9th grade. A teacher comes on Saturdays for the high schoolers, and then they are on their own for the rest of the week. This has not been successful, so Ben sought to make a change by bringing El Pital into the 21st century with some donated computers.

Ben formulated a plan to build a computer lab with a library, for the community of El Pital. His plan, called the Information Center Project was created by Ben to bring the people of the area into the computer age by addressing the problem of computer literacy as well as other educational issues. Funds were donated, (remember eating at Petrini's and making a donation?) over \$11,000 was finally raised, and construction began in June 2008 with completion in September 2008.

As Ben wrote in his proposal, "the Information Center will drastically improve the lives of El Pitalians by improving computer literacy and education in general, which will carry over to better job prospects within El Salvador. This means that fewer people in El Pital will face the dangers of illegal immigration to the U.S. and that fewer families will be left behind by immigrants heading north."

Peace Corps Partnership had never undertaken such a large project before and because of the Information Center Project's success, they are now using Ben's visions as models for other volunteer projects all over the world.

Ben is a 30 year old young man with imagination, creativity and a heart bigger than most. The time he spent with the Peace Corps in El Salvador has opened his eyes to the world. He has touched the lives of thousands of people, all over the U.S. and in El Salvador, making our world, and our lives, that much better.

Unfortunately, Ben is out of town and unable to accept his award in person, so accepting this award on his behalf are his parents, Mary Jo (Bishop High class of 1970) and Vern Williams.