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## **Zonta Clubs and Peace Corps Helping to Save Lives in Guatemala**

Since 2007, six Zonta Clubs in Southwest Florida have assembled 6,000 simple “birthing kits” for use by midwives to ensure safer, more hygienic births in Guatemala, a country with one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world. Reports from Guatemala are that lives are indeed being saved, not only babies but also the birthing mothers.

The birthing kit project began in Australia and was witnessed by Nola Theiss at the 2006 Zonta International Convention in Melbourne. As 2006-2008 Director for Zonta Area 6, she brought the project to the clubs and they unanimously agreed to participate. The clubs in Area 6 are from Bonita Springs, Fort Myers, Naples, Port Charlotte/Punta Gorda, Sanibel/Captiva and Sarasota.

Most of the supplies, including plastic sheeting, latex gloves, gauze, razor blades and twine, were donated by LeeSar, a local medical supply company. The items are neatly assembled in reusable plastic bags. Zonta members met at various locations in SW Florida including the Sanibel Public Library to assemble the kits. Miracles in Action, a Naples-based non-profit dedicated to improving the quality of life in Guatemala, provided air transport to Guatemala.

Meanwhile, two Peace Corps volunteers based in one of the poorest, most remote sections of Guatemala recognized the need for this type of medical intervention. Searching the web, they found a news item about the Zonta birthing kit project, coordinated in SW Florida by Nola Theiss, a member of the Sanibel-Captiva Club. Zonta, Miracles in Action, and the Peace Corps then worked together to get the kits into the hands of the Peace Corps volunteers. Now the Peace Corps volunteers hold monthly classes for local midwives who are then given kits for use with their patients.

The kits are distributed primarily in Huehuetenango in the western highlands of Guatemala. According to Zach Nostdal, a Peace Corps volunteer who works with local community educators, the midwives are thrilled to receive the kits which they believe can save the lives of many mothers and babies in this area of Guatemala, the home of many SW Florida migrant workers.

Zonta International is a service organization of professional women working together to advance the status of women worldwide. Locally, Zonta clubs provide hands-on assistance, advocacy and funds to strengthen women’s lives on the islands, in Lee County and throughout SW Florida. For information, visit [www.zontasancap.com](http://www.zontasancap.com).

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Captions:

#3072: Peace Corps volunteer Zach Nostdal (left) demonstrates use of the birthing kit materials to midwives from the Huehuetenango area of western Guatemala

#3077: Midwives from Huehuetenango, one holding donated birthing kits



#3072: Peace Corps volunteer Zach Nostdal (left) demonstrates use of the birthing kit materials to midwives from the Huehuetenango area of western Guatemala



#3077: Midwives from Huehuetenango, one holding donated birthing kits



#3079: Midwives from Huehuetenango meet monthly for instruction and to receive free birthing kits

