

belize?

“WHAT DID YOU DO THERE?”

“Anything they needed for us to do,” Cindy Shaffer '03 and her husband, Dick, respond back

by Cindy Shaffer '03, Director of Planned Giving

(Editor's note: Cindy Shaffer has been a member of the College staff for 10 years. Cindy requested a leave from the College for this past fall semester (2007) so that she and her husband Dick could fulfill their own call through a personal mission trip to Belize. They explain all of this in their own way, but suffice it to say that it was appropriate for the college to practice what it preaches and approve this unique leave. -- Richard A. Pejeau, Vice President for Institutional Advancement)

“Addicted to children with smiles on their faces,” are lyrics of a Kelly McGuire song written about Ambergris Caye, Belize. I can't think of better words to define the experience that my husband, Dick, and I had during the three months that we volunteered in Belize at Holy Cross Anglican Primary School in San Pedro Town, Ambergris Caye. We went there in answer to a plea for help from the school administration and fell hopelessly in love with the people and the place.

“What did you do there?” is the question we have been most frequently asked since our return and our response is “Anything they needed for us to do.” The little school, built to provide education to San Pedro's poorest children, is just in its second year of existence, and has grown from 62 students to 462. The grades offered have expanded from three (equivalent to US kindergarten, first and second grades) to eight (through US seventh grade). With that growth and the addition of older children came many challenges.

Nine classrooms and an addition to the “cafeteria” were constructed by volunteers during the summer of 2007. Teachers had to be hired and trained, desks secured,

uniforms acquired and distributed. The school provides breakfast, a mid-morning snack of fresh fruit, and lunch for each student. How do you go from feeding 150 children (the enrollment at the end of the 2006-07 school year) to feeding more than three times that number? It is not an easy task!

The first two weeks following our arrival were spent doing long hours of physical labor, sanding, painting, assembling desks and moving furniture. Once school started, we were very process focused, helping in the kitchen, serving breakfast and lunch. Later we established a tutoring program for children who needed reading assistance, and after school provided homework help. When a mission team arrived in November from Wyoming, it was our responsibility to see that they were kept busy and had a rewarding experience.

We found that working in an elementary school is a wonderful way to become integrated into a community. When children know you, their parents will recognize you too. The primary modes of transportation in San Pedro are walking or riding bicycle. This allows for a level of socialization that we no longer know in the United States, people passing people on the streets, greeting each other warmly. We couldn't go anywhere without hearing little voices call out to us,



“Hi Mr. Richard! Hello Miss Cindy!” Often times, we would find ourselves unable to move because we were surrounded by hugging children; children who were so happy for the opportunity to go to school and for people willing to invest their time with them.

In the Sunday, May 27, 2007 newspaper column written by DC president Jerry Wood for *The (Defiance) Crescent News*, he addressed the responsibility of each of us to see that children everywhere are given the opportunity for education. “This would be a different world we live in if we but worked together to ensure that every child had a chance to set goals and a fighting

chance to meet them.” Dick and I are very appreciative that President Wood and others on campus supported us in the decision to serve in Belize. I owe a special thanks to my coworkers in the Office of Institutional Advancement for doing “extra duty” while I was away. ♦