



FWM ambassadors Susan and Joe Rubio are the driving force behind the biennial Prescott Miracle of Mobility, which was held on September 23, 2019 and raised funds to provide 873 wheelchairs.

The Rubios first got involved with FWM in 2007, when they were living in California and embarked on a mission trip to Peru with their church. "Of all the activities that we were involved in," recalls Susan of that trip, "there was no question that the wheelchairs had the most impact on the people we were distributing them to—and had the most impact on us."

Since that first trip, the Rubios have participated in wheelchair distributions in Vietnam, Mexico, and countries throughout Central America. Their tireless efforts as supporters and fundraisers have helped transform thousands of lives, all over the world, with the gift of a wheelchair.

ARIZONA AMBASSADORS

When Susan (3rd from left) and Joe Rubio (2nd from left) moved to Arizona, they brought their passion for the cause of mobility with them.

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GUATEMALA

A PARADISE BEYOND REACH

With its fertile, green highlands, sweeping volcanic peaks, and shimmering blue lakes, Guatemala has been described as one of the most beautiful places in the world. "The most magnificent spectacle we ever saw," wrote 19th century travel writer, John L. Stephens, of Guatemala's famed Lake Atitlán—a breathtaking scene some have likened to the Garden of Eden.

However, not everyone in Guatemala has the luxury of enjoying its natural wonder.

More than half the population lives below the poverty line, with nearly a quarter of Guatemalans—many of whom hail from indigenous communities—living in extreme poverty. The country has one of the highest rates of malnutrition in the world, affecting almost half of all children under five.

In order to survive and/or feed their families, a number of Guatemalans leave their hometowns to work in the cities, or they spend long hours working in factories, leaving home before sunrise and coming home after sunset.

For them, there's little time to stop and soak in the natural splendor of their homeland.

And for some Guatemalans who live with a disability, the ability to simply go outside can be a dream beyond their reach.



SUPPLEMENTAL VIDEO

Visit Guatemala through this unique, immersive, 360° video:

http://bit.ly/GuatemalaVR



FREE WHEELCHAIR MISSION

DISABILITY IN GUATEMALA

An estimated 170,000 Guatemalans live with a disability and need a wheelchair but are unable to obtain one on their own. Without mobility, these individuals often depend on someone to carry them or are forced to crawl.

A 2016 survey found that disability affects one-third of all households in Guatemala. Children with disabilities are less likely to attend school, particularly in rural areas, and this lack of a formal education contributes to higher rates of unemployment for adults who live with disabilities. As a result, families affected by disability in Guatemala are more likely to be in under-resourced socio-economic groups.

Free Wheelchair Mission responds to this need in partnership with four other nonprofits: Faith In Practice (FIP), Food For The Poor (FFTP), Hope Haven (HH), and Operation Blessing (OB). Along with a network of sub-distribution partners, this collaboration has provided 23,656 wheelchairs to the people of Guatemala since 2005.

QUIET STRENGTH

Mayra, 36, doesn't allow disability to stop her from raising nine children.



RESILIENCE IN ADVERSITY

Guatemala's unspoiled landscapes often mean unpaved roads and rugged terrain—conditions for which our wheelchairs were designed.

A Free Wheelchair Mission team recently delivered a wheelchair to Mayra, a 36-year-old mother of eight living in Patulul municipality, nestled in the foothills at the base of Atilán Volcano. When Mayra was 20, she suffered a spinal cord injury in an accident involving a “chicken bus”—one of the retired American school buses, repainted in vivid hues, repurposed for affordable mass transportation in Guatemala. These old buses are often dangerously overloaded with passengers, like chickens in a coop; hence, the moniker.

To get to Mayra's home, our team's van veered off the paved main road and onto a steep, rocky path. As they grinded their way up into the hills, clusters of modest homes began to appear: roughly 300-400 individual units, growing out of one another like corals on a reef.

These homes were constructed by volunteers in the wake of severe flooding that displaced thousands in 2015. Mayra's old home was washed away by the torrent, so she was grateful for this new house, which was built out of cinderblocks on higher ground to avoid a similar fate.

The main source of light in Mayra's house is an open window, which has no glass or screens to keep insects out. The corrugated metal roof shields them from downpours most of the time, but when the winds are strong, rain enters the house through one side, which is completely open to the elements. Sometimes, rainwater is welcome—Mayra collects it in a rusty drum and uses it for cooking, bathing, and doing laundry.

Mayra might live with a disability, but she has no caregiver: rather, she is the one providing care for her entire family, including her eight children and one grandchild. Her husband is rarely home. She had been supporting the family by selling cosmetics, but when her old wheelchair broke down, she was left unable to continue and earn a living. There was no food anywhere in the house on the day our team arrived at her house.

Despite the adversity she faces, Mayra exudes



FILLED WITH GRATITUDE

Mayra and her daughter were more than happy to pose for our upcoming Christmas cards.

a quiet strength and confidence. She makes the best of whatever she has and doesn't seek pity. A dignified woman, Mayra had put on her best clothes to meet our team.

We fitted Mayra with a GEN_3 wheelchair that folds to make it easier to bring on public transportation. The mountain bike tires help her traverse the steep, rocky terrain around her house and can easily be repaired or replaced at any local bike shop.

Her stoic countenance broke into a grin when she sat in her new wheelchair and gave it a test drive. She expressed deep gratitude for this gift, which will allow her to resume working and be more efficient in managing her household responsibilities.

Moments like these are happening all over Guatemala because of you. “We hear stories at every clinic of lives transformed,” stated a representative from Faith In Practice. “Children are able to go to school, adults are able to go to church. Caregivers are freed from the physical burden of carrying their loved ones.”

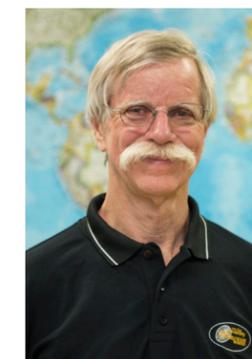
“With these wheelchairs, we can help many people with disabilities to be independent, and we share the love of God with them,” said Hope Haven. “It helps the community's economy since the wheelchair makes the person with disabilities

independent and provides income to the family.”

We're grateful for our distribution partners, who do the hard work of assessing needs in the field, identifying potential wheelchair recipients, importing and assembling wheelchairs, and custom-fitting each one to its recipient. We couldn't accomplish this mission without them—or without you, our friends and supporters, who help transform lives with the gift of a wheelchair.

The needs are still great in Guatemala and beyond: an estimated 75 million people around the world need a wheelchair but can't afford one. Together, we've already provided 1.2 million wheelchairs in 93 countries, and together, we can give away another million by 2025.

Thank you for partnering with us in offering renewed hope to individuals like Mayra, all over the world.



Blessings,

Don Schoendorfer

Don Schoendorfer, Ph.D.
Founder and President
Free Wheelchair Mission