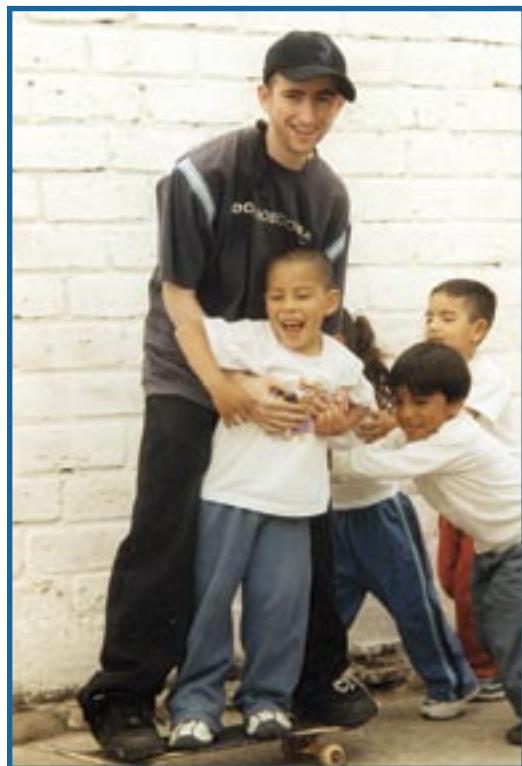


Pine Tree Academy Seniors Share God's Love in Cuenca, Ecuador

April 14, 2004, found fourteen seniors, their sponsor, and six parents headed to the airport. The class mission trip they had been planning for many months was finally underway! In Boston, they checked their bags through to Quito, Ecuador. After touring Quito and the equatorial monument the following morning, they flew on to Cuenca. Waiting for the arrival of their bags, a clamor was heard in the waiting area. Looking through the glass revealed 18 children in their school uniforms, all wearing Panama hats. (The name is misleading, as the hats are actually made in Ecuador; Cuenca is the nation's largest producer.) As the group went out to greet them, each child gave the hat they were wearing as a welcome gift.

Early Friday morning, the group walked the mile or so to Eden Centrivo Educational Center, the Adventist school in Cuenca that currently has Grades Pre-K and K. The day was spent singing songs together,

Caleb Fisher gives kindergartners a ride around the courtyard on his skateboard.



Bethany Kittle helps sand desks for the new first grade classroom.

playing games, learning names, and sharing lunches.

For church the next day, the seniors in PTA's Spanish II class had created a play about the story of Joseph, which they performed for the children's story. It was ten minutes long, and not only did the children enjoy it, but the adults in the congregation clearly found it amusing as well. Even with botched pronunciations, the people appreciated the students' efforts and asked for an impromptu presentation of special music. It was providential that one student had purchased a guitar the previous afternoon because it came in handy for the group on many occasions throughout the trip!

Before their arrival, the seniors had asked the school for a wish list. Most needs were monetary, so arrangements were made to donate playground equipment, a laptop computer, a TV/DVD player, desks and supplies, including painting materials, to add a first grade classroom next year.

As the school week passed, mornings were spent bonding with the children, and afternoons were reserved for sanding wooden desks, painting, and other things. Even though the seniors didn't build major physical structures, they knew they made a difference by sharing Jesus through friendships with the children and helping the school in its own desired ways.

In addition to their work at the school, the seniors were also able to gain cultural and educational experiences during their time in Ecuador. A day was spent hiking and sightseeing in Las Cajas National Park, 12,000 feet high in the Andes. Another day trip took the group to Ingapirca, one of the northernmost ruins of the Incan Empire, where world history came to life and God provided a special blessing of letting a baby llama be born while the seniors looked on. The last three days of the trip were spent at the Pacific Ocean. All too soon, it was time to pack up bags full of souvenirs and head back to Maine with memories of two weeks of life-changing experiences, both for the seniors and the children they loved in Ecuador.

*Laura Paise, 2004 class sponsor
Pine Tree Academy*