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GoLite Lends a Hand in Guatemala

BY GERALD BALDINO

With so much political attention right now on the humanitarian crisis at the United States' southern border, it's easy to lose sight of the difficult conditions that are forcing people to migrate north. One of the main contributing factors, of course, is extreme, prolonged poverty that is taking a significant toll on many local economies across Latin America.

"Guatemala and Honduras have seen over 1 percent of their total population migrate to the U.S. in the first seven months of this fiscal year," explained homeland security secretary Kevin McAleenan, back in May. "One department of Guatemala, Huehuetenango, has seen almost 35,000 of its residents – close to 3 percent of the population – migrate to the U.S. in that time frame."

Guatemala is facing an especially difficult time right now. According to the Central Intelligence Agency, more than half of the Guatemalan population is now below the national poverty line, while 23 percent lives in extreme poverty. What's more, the CIA continues, poverty among indigenous

groups – which make up more than 40 percent of the population – averages 79 percent. And roughly one-half of children under five years of age are chronically malnourished.

A large portion of the country remains without access to resources like clean water and medical care. In many communities, basic health knowledge is scarce.

Suffice to say, a little bit of help goes a long way in Guatemala – and the outdoor industry is starting to act. GoLite, for instance, recently teamed up with nonprofit Medical Teams International to help provide rural communities with important public health resources.

In Guatemala, GoLite's team delivered on-site support and materials to build critical water systems. Its crew helped build numerous structures, including sinks and latrines. The company also covered a portion of the building material cost and donated uniforms for field staff.

GoLite's participation, it should be noted, comes on the heels of its 2018 donation of more than 14,000 uniforms to Medical Teams International staff in Uganda.

Retailers will remember GoLite as a former leading provider of lightweight tents, apparel and packs. The company went bankrupt in 2014, closing about 20 domestic brick-and-mortar retail stores in the process.

Now, GoLite is back – along with new owners, a new logo and a new area of focus. The company, which is now being funded by a Taiwanese holding company, relaunched in 2018 with an earth-friendly activewear collection that the company calls "Outletics."



GoLite and Medical Teams International Guatemala staff

One thing that has stayed the same, as the above example proves, is GoLite's commitment to social and environmental responsibility. When the company relaunched, it created a humanitarian program called GoAid, which has been working closely with Medical Teams International.

"What's left after we make our clothes is just the beginning for others," the company said. "Our way of repurposing fabric is empowering people to independently support their families. Utilizing the micro-enterprise model, we are working to help people create small, sustainable businesses by putting excess fabric into their hands. These materials enable communities to sew a future from what used to be waste. GoAid is not a handout, it's a way up."

The company is also operating under its GeoResponsibility code of conduct, which is a commitment to utilizing cutting-edge sustainable fibers, finishes and manufacturing processes. More than 80 percent of GoLite's Spring 2019 introductory GoLite product line, in fact, was developed from environmentally preferred, recycled and low-energy production materials. For the Spring 2020 line, these percentages have shot up to 92 percent. ○



GoLite helped build 27 toilets and many in-hut sinks in remote Guatemalan villages