

Mini Trip Report

Honduras September 2026
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Introduction

I spent three weeks at our project site in San Jose Honduras during September. Much of the focus for this trip was preparing the project site for a medical/dental team arriving in late October. There is much work that needs to be done behind the scenes to support a team from the US. In addition to the prep work, I was able to help some of the local population. Below is a report on my activities.

Water Problems

During our May 2026 medical brigade we had no water for the group to bathe and the staff to use in the kitchen. May is when the rainy season usually starts. Given there is no municipal water in San Jose we collect rain water for all the water we use. The rains had not started when our group was in San Jose in May. We were forced to purchase water and have it trucked to our project site in May. The water is very expensive and dirty. To complicate the issue, the 4,000 gallon cement tank we built many years ago to hold rain water was leaking. Repairs to the leaking tank in April were not fully successful. In May I purchased and installed a 1,500 gallon plastic tank. I just needed water to place in the tank.

One major goal this trip was to fill the new 1,500 gallon plastic tank in preparation for the Fall brigade. The group usually requires 2,000 – 3,000 gallons of water for their 11 days in San Jose. Normally San Jose experiences rains almost every day during the rainy season which runs from about May through September/October. There were a few rains in late May after our group left. The farmers planted their crops as they do every year in May but then the rains stopped. All their crops died when there was no rain for three months of the rainy season. This will be a difficult year for many people in San Jose given the anticipated food shortages from the crop failures. Even the natural springs people use to get water were starting to dry up because of the lack of rain. When I arrived in San Jose in September there was about 1,200 – 1,500 gallons of water in the cement tank. Usually at this time of year the tank would be full. For my first 10-12 days in San Jose there was still no rain and the days were hot. Fortunately for us the rains started mid way through my time in San Jose. I was able to fill the 1,500 gallon tank by pumping water from the cement tank. When I left San Jose at the end of September the cement tank was $\frac{3}{4}$ full. If the rains continue the group in October should have enough water for bathing and cooking.



Black 1,500 gallon water tank, and the wall of the cement tank in the foreground

Other Brigade Prep Activities

Communication at the community level is sometimes not great. Therefore I spread the message to everyone I met of the dates for this Fall brigade. Hopefully this will help people take advantage of the medical and dental professionals in San Jose.

The “kitchen” the Honduran cooks use is just a makeshift area between the adobe wall of a communal building, our cement tank, some rough wood planks, and a roof made up of rusted metal sheets. The traditional stove has not been working well and made the kitchen very smoky. I arranged to have the stove rebuilt and the chimney improved.

Most Hondurans use a structure called a pila. It is a locally-constructed combination water storage area and a washing area where dishes are washed. We never had a pila so I had one built while I was in San Jose. Hopefully this will make the already difficult job of cooking in the simple kitchen a bit easier.

The volunteer house where the group stays has developed leaks in multiple roof locations. With heavy rains I would identify areas of concern. The following day when the rain had stopped I would get on the roof and attempt to locate the leaking roof locations and then try and patch the leaks. Although I was not always successful I have significantly reduced the number of leaks. One of the biggest leaks was into the bunk room where many of the residents sleep. A number of years ago a tree had fallen on the house. The metal roof had a small penetration I was finally able to find and patch. Hopefully no more wet beds this trip.



Edis building the pila in the makeshift brigade kitchen

Politics and the Land Dispute

In 2009 we obtained a 99 years lease on land where we built the volunteer house. In 2014 the school system started claiming that land was theirs. Over the past four years this dispute has intensified. We have been working with the county government, the school system, organizations at the national level, and we have hired lawyers in an effort to resolve the issue. Based on current information we do seem to have the rights to the land. However, more steps are needed to resolve this issue.

Although elections were held in November 2025 there are still disputes about who the mayor is for the entire county where San Jose is located. It appears that the functioning mayor for San Marcos County is Oscar Pineda. He had been the mayor for the previous four years. I was able to meet with him to discuss the ongoing land dispute issue we are having with the San Jose school. Oscar said he will create a legal document to end the school's claim on the leased land. This document has not been seen and the legality of this approach is unclear. The political situation in San Jose is so dysfunctional there presently is no leader in San Jose. It would be best to have a leader in San Jose so we could rewrite the lease. This approach is not possible at this time. Therefore, we keep working on this issue.

Computer Education for Children

There is a small group of children who really enjoy spending time with us as they learn how to use computers. Almost every afternoon after school and chores were completed they would be in the volunteer house. The children have gotten much better at using the keyboard and mouse. This is mainly accomplished using on-line games made for this purpose. The older children (6th grade) have progressed to learning about word processors, drawing programs, and even the use of spreadsheets. In addition to learning about computers they get to draw on paper, learn a little English, and even dance for fun. The 6th graders hope to get scholarships from our group so they can continue their education beyond 6th grade. We have visited the children's homes and they are quite poor. A scholarship may be their only hope of attending 7th grade. One thing we have noticed is their ability to write is very limited. Given how smart these children are we suspect it is a failure of the educational approach used by the San Jose school system.



Children on the porch of the volunteer house learning computer skills

Solar System Installations

A main focus for this trip was to install as many small solar systems as possible in homes in the San Jose area that cannot access government electricity. There are many pieces of equipment necessary to complete a solar install. Much of the material I have shipped from the US. Some of the needed materials I purchase in Honduras. Over the past few years I have built the wood boxes that hold the battery and the control panel for the solar system. Building the battery boxes can take days of work. In May I found a carpenter willing to build the boxes for a reasonable price. I decided to have the carpenter build 10 boxes and have them ready by early September. This would allow me to spend more time doing solar installs given I would not spend 4-5 days building the battery boxes. Unfortunately the carpenter did not build any boxes. He stated he was having trouble getting the wood. This meant I could only complete 6 solar installs this trip using the six boxes I had built in February.



Children and Melissa taking a break from computers to dance with joy

Getting wood to use to build the battery boxes in San Jose is very different from running out to Home Depot or Lowes and purchasing wood that is ready to be used. I must purchase freshly cut pine boards from a saw mill that is located about 45 minutes away. Then transport must be arranged to get the green/wet wood to San Jose. The wood has to be stacked and dried in the volunteer house porch for at least 3 months before it can be used. Then the wood has to be planed to make the boards smooth and ready to be cut to size for the battery boxes.



Building the electronic parts for the battery boxes



Roof view of a home where we will place a solar panel



One of 6 families that received a solar system this trip

The six solar installs completed this trip went well. Three poor homes in Potreros and three poor homes in Portillon received solar systems. This brings our total solar installs to 68 homes. We still have over 100 homes on the list interested in getting the solar systems. If we decide to help isolated poor homes outside of our current project area we could have hundreds more homes to help. There are many logistical barriers to completing solar installs. Some of these include contacting people on our list of those interested in the system. Cell service is very limited in the area and many people don't have a cell phone or they lose their number or they cannot afford to buy minutes. Given the long

distances that must be traveled to reach these isolated homes we try to group 2-3 homes near each other for a day of installs. Finding transportation to get close to the project homes can be a challenge. Then the weather may cause problems. As the battery box issue this trip illustrates, having all the needed materials can also cause problems.

Coffee Sales

We help out a couple local coffee farmers by bringing their ready-to-roast coffee back to the US. This farm-to-table approach cuts out the middle man so the farmer gets all the profit from coffee sales. Thanks to everyone who supports this project by buying our “Burned Ranch” coffee. I met with the two farmers and paid them their profits. They are so appreciative of the help this project provides and hope we can continue.



Water Filters

For many years we have used ceramic filters produced in another part of Honduras. Given the logistics of transporting the filters from the artisan factory to San Jose we are exploring other options.

Although the required filter parts for a new type of filter are listed on-line for stores in major cities in Honduras we could not find the filter elements anywhere. I did bring one filter element from the US and found two buckets required to make a filter. The buckets actually came from a bakery in Esperanza (75 minutes from San Jose). I built a test filter this trip and it appears to be working well. We hope to expand on this in the near future.



New version of water filter utilizing low cost materials

Summary

Thanks to the extended HFM family and the Unitarian Church of Rochester that makes our activities in Honduras possible. Over the past 21 years we have improved the lives of thousands of people in San Jose. We hope to continue this cross country collaboration for many years to come.

Doug Stockman



View of the volunteer house with the misted mountains in the background



Homeowner preparing rocks to mount solar panel on roof



Cook stove we built many years ago still looking great