



It Started with a Bus

Probigua Switzerland, the literacy project for remote schools in Guatemala, celebrates its tenth anniversary this year.

Anyone who visits Guatemala cannot fail to be impressed by the rich colours and sheer beauty of this country, the lakes and volcanoes, the Maya ruins, the friendliness of the people – and the poverty. Exactly ten years ago, five Swiss people who'd met at a language school in Antigua to learn Spanish set up the Probigua – PRO BIBlioteca GUAtemala – association in Switzerland to support the Probigua project in Guatemala. The project was set up by the founder of the language school, Rigoberto Zamorra, to improve education in poor outlying schools.

That means providing books – hence the idea of a mobile bus. The original bus – there are now two, driving round on a weekly schedule – was an old US school bus, which was rebuilt and repainted under the expert guidance of

garage owner Max Umiker, president of Probigua Schweiz.

Thanks to donors like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Royal Library in Stockholm, the Thomas Stanley Foundation in London, the cantons of Basel-Stadt and -Land and various other organisations in the US and Switzerland, Probigua can provide financial support to a teacher training college in Antigua, Soccoro, which trains young women from remote areas: they typically go back to their own villages to teach. It also enables the association to build new classrooms in villages that otherwise only have a tarpaulin to shelter the pupils, and virtually no teaching aids.

A huge tenth birthday celebration was held last month at the school hall in Bottmingen, with Guatemalan



As well as acting as a mobile library, the bus also carries small wooden buses holding about 300 books each, which the children can pull into their classrooms with a rope and keep for a few weeks.

marimba and other Latin American music, typical food, a fashion show with over 20 typical outfits from Guatemala – and they are all hand-woven and embroidered, and very colourful – an American auction for a handmade quilt, a children's corner, and much more.

The tenth AGM is being held on April 13, 2008 at the Hotel Mittenza in Muttentz at 11 pm, followed by lunch.

A Probigua trip to Guatemala is being organised in April 2009, which will give visitors the chance of seeing Probigua projects in progress as well as the famous flower carpets for the Easter procession in Antigua, the Maya ruins and the fabulous countryside and markets. This represents a fantastic opportunity of visiting the country with expert multilingual guides, who will also show you aspects of the country not usually seen by tourists.

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