



70 Years Since Quakers Arrived in Monteverde

April 19, 1951 marked the arrival of the first Quakers from Alabama to an unnamed rural area in Costa Rica with rich land and nature, few residents and even fewer amenities. Getting here was so rough that it wasn't unusual for oxen to have to drag trucks up the dirt road along the mountain. Even then, the trucks might need a new axle from the rough road.

Seventy years later in Monteverde -- the name the Quakers dubbed the area -- we celebrate Monteverde Day at the same school those Quakers founded not long after getting here. In these pandemic times, we didn't have the parades and gatherings in which Monteverde Day was celebrated in previous years, but our students celebrated in their classes nonetheless.

And here we are, after those 70 years, almost finished with one of the most unusual school years ever. We went from virtual to hybrid in-person/virtual school, dozens of health protocols to follow and finally, vaccines to try and control COVID infections. What a long, strange year it has been!

A year ago, we wondered with great anxiety whether we would even be able to afford to open the school this year. But our amazing donors stepped up, donating more than twice as much as any previous year. And now, our amazing supporters are doing it again, meeting a \$10,000 challenge match in just a week and donations are still going strong.

Saying "thank you" over and over still doesn't seem enough to show our gratitude. But perhaps the stories below on creative learning and creative funding to help families with tuition will say thank you for us by showing how well your support is put to use.



*Our students celebrate
Dia de Monteverde with art.*



Ambitious Junior/Senior Projects



Angelina Figuerola López, Suyen Melissa Alvarado Sánchez, and Melanie Fabiana García Quesada hard at work on panels of a mosaic that is now mounted along a wall in busy downtown Santa Elena, Monteverde.

What if you had to come up with a project and your graduation from your program depended on it? What would you want to explore? How would you go about it?

That's what our 11th and 12th graders are challenged to do in order to graduate from MFS. (In Costa Rican schools, students graduate after the 11th grade. At MFS, we offer a certificate for those who want to leave after 11th grade and a diploma for those who continue through 12th grade.)

Just like for a college or graduate thesis, the students are required to present a proposal, find a mentor with particular skills needed for the project, submit a written report on what they did and make an oral presentation on their experience and what they learned.



11th Grader Ximena Gonzales Marchena and her veterinary internship.



As our high school teacher Pam Holschuh puts it, "When our students arrive at university, they already have research experience."

Ideas for these projects vary widely. As shown in the pictures, three of the students worked with the Monteverde Commission for Resilience to Climate Change ([CORCLIMA](#)) to produce a series of mosaic panels that celebrate pedestrians. The mosaics have been attached to a wall in a local downtown area for a permanent display. Here's a short video showing [all the panels fully installed](#).

Another student is helping organize a tree planting effort to restore natural forest where trees were cut down for agriculture. Two students are helping to protect our amazing local bird species, one by helping tag migratory birds for research, and another is up a dawn to help take a census of birds. Another, an avid soccer player, is completing an internship with the Federación Costarricense de Fútbol. And another student has assisted in veterinary procedures, as pictured.

This work gives our students the skills to select and reflect on a project, and learn how best to document and present it. But the projects also give them the opportunity to explore a hobby or perhaps a career interest. Some build upon their project through college and into a career, like a graduate two years ago whose project explored the effects of migrants on a border town and who is now an undergraduate at Stanford working toward a career in international law. Others may find, just as importantly, that the project they pursued tells them their selected topic is not a career path for them.

These projects usually wrap up with presentations to a large audience of students, teachers and families. Sadly, we cannot have such a gathering this year but we look forward to future years when we can.

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!

We are amazed at the outpouring of support in response to our request earlier this month to help with scholarships. We are beyond grateful and our scholarship committee is working hard, evaluating each application for family need and deciding on the amount of scholarship to award.

And to show our gratitude, this newsletter is free of our standard request for donations!

A Whole New Kind of Work Study



Parents plant new trees, earning tuition for their children at MFS while restoring forests to Monteverde.

Work/study programs are well known in colleges: a student works part-time for the school and gets tuition or room and board in exchange. But how's this for a twist on that idea?

What if the benefits of donations could serve not just one purpose, but multiple purposes at the same time?

That was the concept that led to ventures that helped some of our school parents afford MFS tuition for their children's education. Many had been laid off or had hours cut back for their jobs as the local economy crashed without tourists, so time was one thing they had available. If they agreed to work on some local projects, their pay would be credited to MFS for the student's tuition. So in this case, it is parents work, and children study.



And the ventures they worked on benefitted the community. Following a GoFundMe campaign organized by our partner foundation in the United States, parents participated in planting 10,000 trees in 2020 as a part of an effort by the [Monteverde Institute](#) to restore natural forests where land had previously been cleared for agriculture.

Two other initiatives are through [CORCLIMA](#). One major effort is replacing the dirt paths that have long served as sidewalks in our area with strong, cement sidewalks that give pedestrians a safe place to walk. The sidewalks and the trenches next to them are designed to stand up to the torrential rain storms during our wet season and the racing streams of water that result.

And with cash in short supply, in another venture, ten mothers of MFS students have created La Tilichera, a barter store where people exchange things they no longer need for things they do need -- a great option for children's clothing, for example. They are now moving into a second phase: upcycling donated materials that cannot be traded, transforming them into new products such as rag rugs or bags.

So, this is a win-win-win. MFS gets tuition paid, students are able to continue their studies with us, and the community benefits!

