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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Novato Residents Provide Handmade Newborn Hats to NICU Babies in Guatemala

*Rotary Club of Novato members work with Guatemalan seamstresses
to sew newborn hats for babies in need.*


NOVATO, CALIF.: When Rotary Club of Novato President Robert Marshall visited Guatemala in 2023 to work on a humanitarian project, he saw babies in a hospital's NICU who were wearing diapers on their heads to keep warm. There just weren't enough newborn hats available for the number of babies in need. Limited resources of both the hospital and families meant that not all babies could receive a beanie at birth.

"I was shocked and couldn't believe that's what they had to do," Marshall said.

This spurred Marshall and the Rotary Club of Novato to start supplying [Pediatria Hospital Nacional de Escuintla](#) in Guatemala with cotton baby beanies so all babies could stay warm during their hospital stay. Marshall began fundraising and spreading the word about the need through his connections in California.

Foster City resident Betty Chambers Toguchi connected Marshall with a nonprofit organization, Handmade by Friendship Bridge®, which helps Guatemalan artisan women expand their businesses. Soon, three Guatemalan seamstresses who are clients of the nonprofit got to work sewing handmade cotton baby beanies for the hospital.

The partnership with the nonprofit meant that the Rotary Club was able to meet the needs of two of Guatemala's most vulnerable populations: low-income Guatemalan seamstresses who desire to expand their businesses as well as the very youngest citizens of Guatemala. And thanks to ongoing fundraising by the Rotary Club, Handmade by Friendship Bridge® just delivered its fourth shipment of beanies for new babies in December 2024.



One artisan hired to work on the baby beanie project was a woman named Jacinta from Tecpán, Guatemala. In the 1980s, Jacinta had to flee her hometown due to the civil war in Guatemala. She started a textile business, which has supported the education of her five children and has allowed her to make improvements to her home. Currently, Jacinta is committed to helping her youngest daughter finish university. She also plans to remodel her workshop and upgrade her sewing machines with income from her business.

To make the program sustainable, the Rotary Club of Novato needs to raise \$6,000 per year. “I would like this to be an endless program,” Marshall said. “No babies should have to wear diapers on their heads to stay warm.”

Individuals or organizations interested in contributing to the project should contact Marshall: RM@IMAINvestors.com.

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About the Rotary Club of Novato: The Rotary Club of Novato is part of Rotary International, a global network of more than 1.2 million people united to take action to create lasting change in communities and across the world. Learn more at www.novatorotary.org.

About Handmade by Friendship Bridge®:

Handmade by Friendship Bridge® is a program of the nonprofit social enterprise Friendship Bridge with a global network of supporters including many across California. It provides economic opportunities for low income artisans in Guatemala to reach larger markets in which they can sell their handmade products. Learn more at www.friendshipbridge.org, click “Shop.”

