

# Hacienda San Rafael Ukum

Volume 1, Issue 1

January 2006

## PROJECT YUCATAN

### SIYAN KA'AN - HORIZONS - HORIZONTES



**SIYAN KA'AN** is Mayan for Horizons.

Literally, a horizon is defined as the place where the sky is born. Like the horizon, this project in Tekit is where opportunity is born.

The children of Tekit have limited opportunities to develop self esteem, realize potential, and feel hopeful about the future due to their legacy of poverty and marginalization. Students have few experiences for creative expression through art, crafts, photography, writing, and athletics because they lack supplies. They have minimal pride in their heritage as a result of limited exposure to Mayan cultural history. Most children are computer illiterate because the schools don't have enough computers. The majority have no access to on-line educational resources, information, and knowledge necessary for life success because only one school is internet-connected. **Our goals are to impact and enrich the lives of the Mayan children of Tekit and their families through educational projects and scholarship programs.** By further educating these youth, we are strengthening and expanding the economic development of their community.



Siyan Ka'an was a three-week "learn-work-earn" program to provide scholarships and stipends for 20 high-potential middle school students who could not afford to attend high school without support. Conceptualized as an educational program dedicated to furthering the educational and employment opportunities for the youth of Tekit, twenty students ranging in age from 14-17 went through an intensive application and interview process to gain a space in this unique program.



Mondays through Fridays, students arrived at the Hacienda at 8AM where breakfast was awaiting their excited arrival. For six hours the students and adult volunteers engaged in a variety of activities: learning the elements of photography with

professional photographers, writing personal reflections, exploring the roots of their culture, experimenting with new artistic media, as well as learning new athletic games.

The students had lessons in fashion photography, wedding photography, and photojournalism. They each wrote a haiku and interviewed the eldest in their family. They had multiple creative opportunities and even learned "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" as part of one of their English lessons.

These are just a few of the many activities and lessons the students participated in. The students approached each activity with the curiosity of a small child and a passion to learn all they could from the volunteers and each other. Initially the students were reserved in their demeanor. As the days went by, the students, like butterflies, broke out of their cocoons and formed deep bonds and relationships with the volunteers. The students began to share their hopes and dreams and the values they hold in their culture. Our volunteers incorporated this information on student needs and interests into the daily program.



At the celebration for their families and community on the last day of Siyan Ka'an, students expressed their anticipation to begin high school and felt empowered by their experiences and friendships. The volunteers said goodbye to the students, knowing they had learned much more than they had taught.

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**BIENVENIDOS A HACIENDA SAN RAFAEL UKUM!**

**Fun Facts about the Hacienda**

- It was once a henequen plantation, then a cattle ranch.
- It contains the unexcavated Mayan ruins of Ukum.
- The Casa Principal contains a chapel dedicated to San Rafael.
- It is located in the town of Tekit, in the Yucatan State of Mexico.



A spark was lit with the purchase of a small coastal property in Puerto Morelos, Quintana Roo, Mexico in 1986. In 2001, Joan Avis began her dream of creating a center for adult learning at a forgotten hacienda that contained soil rich in history and culture. Instantly connecting with the Mayan people and culture, she and James Lewis began to envision a life far beyond days of relaxing on the pristine beaches!



Avis and Lewis hoped this old henequen plantation would be restored in the future to become a working hacienda and an educational/retreat center. Hacienda San Rafael Ukum had much to offer the creative eye of Avis and she began to use it as a launching pad for her many projects.

In June of 2004, the first of many events was held at Hacienda San Rafael Ukum. Gathering IX was an opportunity for people north and south of the border who engage in healing work to come

together for collective learning and sharing. This conference, attended by participants from Chile, Cuba, Nicaragua, Peru, Mexico, and the United States, led Avis to ponder other uses of the hacienda land and the ways in which the people of Tekit could benefit from its revival. Through meetings with the local officials of Tekit, Avis and Jude Elliott learned about the few educational and

employment options available to youth. Seeing a pressing need among the local Mayan youth for education, resources, and support, Avis and Elliott set out to find solutions.

In July of 2005, Siyan Ka'an was created to offer gifted youth with limited financial resources and little hope of further education a summer enrichment program and financial support to attend high school. Twenty youth from Tekit were selected to participate in the three-week program. While this program was running, Avis was also hard at work in the main square on an educational and cultural center. In three short weeks, the town of Tekit was enlivened by the many opportunities Avis, her colleagues, and friends had introduced.

**2005 Siyan Ka'an Volunteers & Staff**

Joan Avis  
Project Director

Ray Bussolari  
Angel Ake Chin

Jude Elliott

Ernie Franic

Judy Goodell

Jessica Herold

Amy Jones

Ruben Ku May

Colleen McKay

Susan Nuttall-Howe

Kristyn Ottoson

Megan Redmond

Pam Redmond

Janet Snyder

Ten amazing girls and ten amazing boys were selected through an interview process. The students range in age from 14-17. Here are a few facts about them...



German

**Meet the Kids!**



Adela, Alma, Marbella, Gladis, and Yameli



Teresa, Alma, Guille



Favorite Subjects

- \* Math
- \* Spanish
- \* Civic & Ethic Formation
- \* Yucatan History

Favorite Past-times

- \* Listening to music
- \* Watching TV
- \* Reading
- \* Playing sports
- \* Talking with friends
- \* Dancing
- \* Drawing
- \* Playing video games
- \* Cooking
- \* Sewing



Marbella, Roger, Nelson, Herbert, Alejandra, Jose



# THANK YOU!

Through your generous contributions we were able to provide scholarships, educational enrichment projects, athletic equipment, artistic supplies and much more! Without your support these very talented and promising young adults would be unable to continue their education.

**From computers to markers, any and all donations were greatly appreciated!**

**Your continued support is necessary for the success of our programs!**

### The Café Ukum Program

**Congratulations** to Joan Avis and the staff of the Café Ukum Program! Every year the Information Technology Services Department of the University of San Francisco donates 150 retired desktop computers to USF-related charitable projects. Last summer, Project Yucatan was the recipient of 12 PCs. This Fall, the project was awarded 10 Macs! Good work Staff! The computers will be placed in Café Ukum in Tekit. Café Ukum is an education center for children and adults in computer literacy and English. The Mayor has given the program three rooms in the newly-designated Casa de Cultura in the town square for the Café. One room will house the internet café, the second room will be used for English classes as well as other educational opportunities for the community, and the third will be an office. The space will provide the program with space to display the talented art work and photography of the students.

**Our greatest need** now is for donations to cover the shipping/packaging costs and import fees to get the computers down to Tekit. We also need a color printer. Items we need for the Café include an air conditioner for the computer room, supplies, and basic equipment for the café/learning center, including a refrigerator.

### The Siyan Ka'an Program Scholarship News

The students received the first two installments of their scholarships! These installments covered much needed books, uniforms, school supplies, and examination fees.

The scholarship is \$400 per year for each student. Please complete the donation form below if you would like to sponsor a student!

### All About Collaboration...

Hacienda San Rafael Ukum initiated a collaboration with the local government and school system of Tekit, the School of Education, University of San Francisco, and the families of the students. Siyan Ka'an and Café Ukum would not be possible without all of these groups coming together and working as a team. A big **THANK YOU** to the team for all your hard work!



## YES! I WOULD LIKE TO HELP THE MAYAN CHILDREN OF TEKIT!

**I want to make a cash contribution to Project Yucatan:**

- \$50                       \$500
- \$100                      \$750
- \$250                     \$1,000

Other Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(Make checks payable to USF / SOE Yucatan Project)

A donation of **\$400** will fund a scholarship for a child for one year.

A donation of **\$400 or more** entitles you to a **Charter Membership** in Siyan Ka'an. As a Charter Member you will receive updates on the progress of the student you are sponsoring, letters from the student, and a photograph.

**I wish to charge my tax deductible contribution to my credit card.**

1. In your browser, type in <https://www.applyweb.com/public/contribute?usfc>. Complete Page 1.
2. On Page 2, Gift Designation, click the arrow and from the drop-down menu select "Other".
3. Specify "Other" by typing in **Yucatan Project**.
4. Specify the amount of your donation.

**\*For more information, please contact Janet Snyder at [snyderj@usfca.edu](mailto:snyderj@usfca.edu) or (415) 422-2874**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**SEND THIS FORM AND YOUR CHECK TO:**

Janet Snyder  
 University of San Francisco  
 School of Education  
 2130 Fulton St.  
 San Francisco, CA 94117-1071



Reina and Guille

Yes I would like to stay informed about Project Yucatan and other Hacienda San Rafael Ukum projects!



# Coming Soon!

- Café Ukum officially opened Friday, November 26, 2005! Look for photos and commentary in the next edition.



- Read about the exciting plans for Summer 2006 in Tekit.
- Meet the students and learn about their first year of high school.
- View more photography from the students.



## Introducing... Ruben Ku May



Ruben is a native of the Yucatan State of Mexico. At the age of 7 he worked with his father in the henequen fields. Ruben realized that he needed to become educated to create a better life for his family. He and Joan Avis met years ago in Puerto Morelos, where Joan and James Lewis became involved in helping him meet his educational goals. Ruben learned English at San Francisco Community College and then received a Presidential Scholarship to attend graduate school at the University of San Francisco. After earning his MBA, he returned to the Yucatan where he worked and assisted his own siblings in furthering their education. Now he helps other Mayan youth through Project Yucatan. He is a central figure in all projects of Hacienda San Rafael Ukum. Ruben was pivotal in identifying the at-risk youth of Tekit and integral to the application and interview process. As Assistant Director of Project Yucatan, he continues to stay connected with the youth and their families as a resource and mentor. Ruben is a role model, demonstrating that opportunities in education and employment exist through hard work and perseverance.

### Editors

Jessica Herold  
Susan Nuttall-Howe

### Editorial Board

Joan Avis  
Betty Dietz  
Jude Elliott  
Judy Goodell

### Photography

Ray Bussolari  
Jessica Herold  
Janet Snyder  
Siyan Ka'an students

What did you think of  
this newsletter?  
We welcome any feedback,  
questions and comments.  
Email us at:  
siyankaan@gmail.com

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*"Nurture the Earth, Cultivate the Soul"*