

Women moved by aid trip abroad

By **MARY DOLAN**
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Five friends who started out as college pals and have a tradition of traveling together each summer decided to make this year's trip a

little different.

Instead of just a vacation, the women decided to go to Guatemala with a group that provides supplies to impoverished schools.

Jeanie Crotts, an administrator with National Healthcare; Karen

Pompeo, an adjunct assistant professor at the University of South Carolina Sumter; and their friend Abby Eblen, who lives in Nashville, Tenn., made the decision that this

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Photo provided
Jeanie Crotts, left, and Karen Pompeo, right, are seen with two children outside a Guatemalan school in August.

AID TRIP

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year's trip would be with a group from Cooperative for Education (CoEd), an organization that visits the impoverished Central American country regularly to deliver much-needed textbooks, computers and other materials.

Pompeo learned of CoEd and its trips after adopting her 5-year-old daughter Rosa from Guatemala. She said she was looking for a way to learn more about and give back to her daughter's home country. Pompeo went on her first CoEd trip in 2003. And as the women began planning this year's trip, the consensus became a desire to turn the vacation into something more.

So the women, with a total group of 30 volunteers, went Aug. 5-10 on a CoEd Snapshot Tour — a tour of schools — with supplies in tow. For this trip, the organization was delivering sports equipment and materials for home economics courses.

Pompeo said building up the schools in Guatemala is crucial because many students discontinue their education after the sixth grade to help their families bring in income. Pompeo has developed such an attach-

ment to the country that for the past couple years she's sponsored the education of a girl named Brenda so that she can continue past the sixth grade, the point at which the country stops funding children's education.

Pompeo got a heartwarming surprise when she was able to meet Brenda at the first school at which the group stopped.

"As soon as we got off the bus, I started crying," Pompeo said.

At each of the schools on the tour, the reaction from students, teachers and administrators was the same, the women said. They were consistently greeted with hugs and thank-yous. Crotts said she was overwhelmed by the amount of appreciation they were shown.

Pompeo and Crotts agree they have not finished giving back to the country they visited. They want to continue to give back.

"Basically, that's the mission of this group: breaking the cycle of poverty through education," Crotts said.

To learn more about CoEd, visit www.coeduc.org/Guatemala.htm.

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Photo provided

Guatemalan schoolchildren show their gratitude for gifts delivered by members of Cooperative for Education during a tour of schools throughout the country last month.