A Week with Guest Anthropologist LIC Rafael Vasquez Guerrero

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LIC Rafael Vasquez Guerrero in the town El Milagro, Peru (Summer 2017).

In Mid October, the anthropology program had a special guest from Trujillo, Peru give a lecture at the Museum of Anthropology. LIC Rafael Vasquez Guerrero is the past Director of the College of Anthropologists in Peru and was the archaeologist of record at the archaeological site Chan Chan for many years. His recent work includes running a nonprofit organization, cultural reconstruction, and cultural heritage reenactments. Rafael has worked with Dr. Bonnie Glass-Coffin for many years as a friend and colleague, and as such, was willing to offer his help on the Summer 2017 ethnographic field school in Huanchaco and Trujillo, Peru. In the beginning of 2017, heavy El Nino rains and flooding struck throughout Peru, and many cities and communities were greatly damaged. One town hit hardest by the flooding is called El Milagro (Spanish for "The Miracle"). El Milagro is a squatter settlement near Trujillo, a town for refugees from all over Peru. Already internally displaced, the El Nino flooding made people in El Milagro refugees once again as they lost nearly everything, including their jobs, homes, clothing, and food. Rafael, Dr. Michelle Grocke, Dr. Bonnie Glass-Coffin, program assistant Becky Montoya, and USU Anthropology students immediately began raising funds to provide basic necessities and aid. Rafael acted as the in-country liason for the people in El Milagro and the field school before, during, and after USU students arrived in Peru.

Rafael discussed these events, and the other adventures of the field school, in his lecture at the museum. During his stay in Logan, Dr. Glass-Coffin and the field school students returned the favor of hospitality by showing Rafael some American things to do, eat, and see. In just one week, Rafael experienced everything from smores and a campfire to country swing dancing to anthropology classes at USU. He ate pizza and hot dogs as well as eating at Herm’s Inn and trying Aggie Ice Cream!

The student’s favorite part, aside from spending time with Rafael, was getting to hear about their friends in El Milagro. Rafael brought nothing but good news! Since the field school’s conclusion in July, the women in El Milagro have started up a business making and selling art and handcrafts to tourists and locals in Trujillo. With this business, the women will be able to raise money to support their families and contribute to the community of El Milagro’s rebuilding. (To make a donation in support of El Milagro, visit McKinley in OM245 or email mckinley.benson@usu.edu.)