I closed out the first part of my report with the aspiration to complete signage, introduce the course to students in their physical education classes, and execute a grand opening event, all in the first months of 2020. Alas, they were only best-laid plans! A mix of personal challenges and other roadblocks made that an impossible goal.

My wife and I returned to Guatemalan in early January of 2020 with a new wheelchair in tow. My youngest son was going to be using it for about a month and a half while he recovered from his surgery. I gave myself some time to get back into the routines of school while tending to my son. Fortunately, we had another work day already on the calendar, in which some students helped prepare a few more tee pads.

Unfortunately, that was about the extent of the progress that could be made at that time before a number of dominoes began to topple over! For one, we lost a teacher who decided to remain in the U.S., which meant that I needed to find a replacement. We had already been looking for another P.E. teacher from before Christmas break, but now we had this new vacancy. Praise God for His provision of replacement teachers who were already in-country -- within a few weeks we had a full staff up and running! This small victory, however, was short-lived. In the last week of January, a group of students returned to campus with Influenza after attending an international conference. Furthermore, a large portion of our staff contracted the flu from those students, AND there was an unexpected and mysterious outbreak of Typhoid Fever on campus which coincided! (In retrospect, we suspect that it was actually Covid-19!) This closed the school for several days while we investigated our water supplies and did a deep cleaning of the school facilities.

Getting back on our feet, we moved into March with trepidation. It didn’t take long for the next domino to fall! As the Coronavirus was sweeping across the globe, Guatemalan officials declared that the borders would be closed upon the first case being identified in the country. It happened on Friday, March 13, 2020, and the government made good on its promise to shut down everything! Suddenly, we were thrust into school in an online-only format. I was instantly overwhelmed as the principal, being

Figure 1: A Few Students and a Teacher Preparing a Tee Pad
tasked with leading my teachers through this drastic transition! Furthermore, fear was stoked among our young teachers who now felt separated from their families in the U.S. Many of them took the first opportunity to board private repatriation flights back home at great expense. Credit to all of them for continuing to serve our students online from abroad. In the case of my own family, we were greatly disappointed to be stuck in Guatemala through the summer, which is normally a time for us to connect with family and friends state-side. The consolation for us was that we had a great outdoor pandemic activity just outside our gate -- the disc golf course!

While I was personally able to enjoy the course with my own family through the summer of 2020, I was unable to finish teepads and signage due to supply chain problems and the long-term closure of everything except grocery stores. It didn’t take long before I had to prepare for a new school year in an online context with all kinds of unknowns and uncertainties. Furthermore, in the midst of those preparations in mid-August, I was forced to fly my family back to the U.S. on a repatriation flight for an emergency surgery for one of my kids. Praise God for a successful surgery and recovery again, but we were stretched to the max living through the late fall and early winter in western Pennsylvania as a family of 8 people in a pop-up camper and the basement of a friend’s house! Fortunately at that time flights back to Guatemala started to open up. In fact, we returned 10 weeks later on flights that were only $26 per person -- unheard of!

Still fully online, we were able to wrap up the semester and celebrate our first Christmas in Guatemala. In January 2021 things were looking up. We were optimistic that the school might be able to return to in-person classes if the government would only allow it. Sadly, our expectations went unfulfilled. Additionally, one of our other kids started exhibiting concerning symptoms that pointed to a high-risk spinal cord surgery. By February we were boarding flights again as a whole family. This time we secured housing for all 8 of us in an upstairs, two-bedroom apartment. The surgery was scheduled as soon as we could kill off a 14-day quarantine. We hoped and prayed for the best, but were instead confronted with the reality that our son completely lost control of one of his legs because of a surgery mistake. Suddenly, my wife and I were trading shifts every couple of days at a rehabilitation center in Pittsburgh, about 1 ½ hours from our apartment.

We were in the midst of a big trial of our faith, but thanks to God, our son largely recovered his strength and nerve function, enough to walk again. It was a period of about 3 months before we could return to the school. Back in Guatemala things were as intense as any other time. We limped across the finish line of the school year, which included my oldest son’s graduation from high school, and whisked ourselves back to the U.S. so that our other son could continue intense rehab in order to regain more function in his leg. Somewhere along the line I also landed in the hospital for a week with an anaplasmosis infection, most likely due to a tick bite while playing disc golf in the woods of Pennsylvania. Watch out for ticks! My recovery stretched into the fall. Needless to say, all this time the disc golf course in Guatemala was on the back burner.

In August of 2021, yet another school year got underway. Once again there was misplaced optimism that there would be an imminent return to “normalcy.” The old routines we craved were only partially realized. As a private school with more resources and a little less scrutiny than that faced by public schools, we were able to return to in-person instruction. Unfortunately, we were still very restricted in terms of large gatherings and having physical education classes. In fact, the school was hit with an anonymous “denuncio” (“complaint”), which resulted in a surprise inspection by the government health department! Fortunately, we passed the inspection, but it reminded us to be cautious because we were being watched closely. Though I was eager to wrap up the whole project, it still wasn’t feasible to do so. The one improvement that was made involved reconfiguring a few of the holes in October of 2021. Being able to play the course frequently myself made me aware of the “trouble spots.” One of those involved hole 1, which was too long for beginners and also lacked a clear fairway. The basket for hole 3 became obstructed by a large tower that was erected in order to complete the roof over the basketball court. Finally, hole 4 was in an area that was slated to become a future exit point for cars to leave the campus. I decided to make a handful of changes to those holes and to hole 6, which are now
evident in the layout on UDisc. Unfortunately, I didn’t get any pictures of the labor that was involved in moving those targets! I assure you that it was a sweaty ordeal.

After a seemingly endless wait, a breakthrough came on February 22, 2022. For the first time since the start of the pandemic the Guatemalan government made provisions for students to have physical education classes at school. Well, I thought it was a breakthrough. After gearing up to have disc golf be our first “pandemic-approved” P.E. class activity, our students’ parents made it clear that they were not supportive of having their kids in P.E. classes yet! What a frustration! I was back to the drawing board. It seemed that the parents were mostly not supportive of the logistical problem of picking their kids up from school a little later than they were accustomed to. (For the 2021-22 school year we have been on a 8am to 1pm schedule in order to allow our students to go home at a reasonable time for lunch, given that we haven’t had government approval to serve food yet. We’ve done our best to pack all the essentials into that time window, so there wasn’t any flexibility to add in P.E. except after 1pm. When we proposed P.E. classes in the afternoon, the school families balked at the idea.)

The next idea was to request permission to hold an event on a Saturday. I got approval to do so for April 23, 2022. I put together an invitation, which was distributed to students at school. We also advertised in the weekly school newsletter. While I personally prefer to use the UDisc app for scorekeeping, I made paper scorecards for the participants. On the morning of the event I had no idea how many people would come, but I was ready for them on the shaded, outdoor basketball court with my practice basket and a bunch of discs. After teaching the participants some of the vocabulary of the game, including basic rules and throwing techniques for putting and driving, all in Spanish, we got in some practice time. Several tried their hand at putting on the practice basket and others took to the open soccer field to try some drives.
### IAS Disc Golf Course Scorecard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hole</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>Total Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Par</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Course Map**

*Note: Your throw must pass to the LEFT of the tree that is marked “MANDO” (Called a “mandatory”)*

*Penalty: Add one throw to your score if your disc goes over a fence or lands on a cement road - “out of bounds” (Non-cement roads and sidewalks are IN bounds - no penalty)*

#### IAS Disc Golf Course Grand Opening

**Saturday, April 23, 2022**

- 10:00am Orientation on the basketball court
  - Basic rules of the game
  - Throwing techniques
  - Course layout
  - Safety/etiquette
- 10:30am Play a round of 12 holes
- 11:30am Rewards on basketball court

**Figure 3:** The Scorecard with Course Map on the back and the Invitation sent to students

**Figure 4:** Putting Practice
With the brief introduction out of the way, everyone was ready to get out on the course! Some of my own kids helped guide everyone around the holes. (Having already invested about $1000 of my own money in the project, I hadn’t yet completed clear signage, other than marking the mandatory on hole 10. In time, I’ll get the signage completed. I’m also hoping that a few others will eventually dedicate some sweat equity and cash to the course by resurfacing the teepads. There’s always more that can be done on a disc golf course!) There were a lot of smiling faces on the course, in addition to loud shouts urging discs into the basket or cursing “Stupid trees!” As the groups finished up, I asked them to complete a one-question survey via a QR code that linked to a Google Form. I simply asked, “What do you think about the disc golf course?” Here are some of their responses:

- “It’s very fun and excellent for doing exercise.”
- “It’s a sport that we enjoyed very much to know and be able to try. I’m sure we will continue playing. Thank you for teaching us.”
- “It’s an excellent activity. Thank you very much for taking the time to make it. It was a good time as a family.”
- “Excellent activity. Very nice and interesting. A lot of fun.”
Figure 6: Participants Enjoying the Course
Additionally, I was touched by an email that I got that very night from a second grade student who came and played with his dad. He thanked me for introducing them to the course and asked if he could come play every Saturday! I replied that of course he could, and that Sunday afternoon was also a great time to enjoy it as a family. I assume that in time, others will catch the disc golf bug and will pass it on. I still fully expect that it will grow more once it can be deployed in the P.E. classes at the school, which we are anticipating at the start of the next school year in August 2022.

It is with tremendous gratitude that I would like to thank the Marco Polo grant, the PDGA, and Prodigy Disc Golf, especially Will Schusterick, for supporting this project. Many thanks for the patience and flexibility granted by Brian Hoeniger, who was tasked with following up on my progress. It was truly a pleasure and a blessing to have a hand bringing Guatemala's first disc golf course to life. I only hope that the sport will continue to grow and proliferate here in the years to come!