

History Highlights



Home Is Where the Heart Is

For many years, most multi-day trips to Mexico have included building a house, and other trips have been organized solely for that purpose. While the traditional outreach day on Thursdays and Saturdays has always had a place providing people with an opportunity to serve and introducing them to another culture, building a house focuses that service on just one family and allows extended interaction.

Spectrum's role in building houses began with a need. People were living in shacks that were literally no more than cardboard boxes. Even though Tijuana has a desert climate, eventually it does rain, reducing the cardboard to mush. Dave Burdette, who was working with Spectrum at the time, decided to meet that need, and God provided resources. A Christian group in San Diego had hosted a huge haunted house in Balboa Park for years, but as the norms changed and Christians shifted away from Halloween activities, the group abandoned that outreach and Spectrum became the beneficiary of all the plywood and lumber that had created the haunted house each year. It was already painted and thus would withstand the elements more readily – painted black with skeletons in some places and with other haunted house designs in others! It must have been a sight to drive up the hill in Grupo México and see the repurposed scenes adorning the houses along the road.

Initially Spectrum houses were just four walls and a roof with an opening for a door, but there are obvious issues with that sort of construction, the main one being a mud floor all winter (or all year if you live downhill from a source of water). Including a concrete floor as well as a window and a door gradually became the standard for each house. Usually the family is asked to help with contributing funds and/or labor for the floor according to their situation, which gives them a greater sense of ownership. Also, before any house is built, the Spectrum team asks to see paperwork proving that the family owns the property where the house will be built. Otherwise the owner might decide to evict the family and rent the improved property to someone else. We build these homes for people with a connection to Spectrum, often people who regularly attend our activities. The reasons for building a house vary. Some are built to replace a house that has burned down, some are completely new, and some are adding a room to an existing house for a very cramped family.

Home may be where the heart is, but a new house can warm the whole body.

