

Members "drop in" for Spanish immersion

Viva Mexico! That was the battle cry of the first Spanish Immersion class to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. This bilingual expedition was headed by three Phoenix Fire Department instructors: Jim Mabry, Rick Garner, and Carlos Pisano who also were students alongside the rest of us. The rest of the crew included Natelle Huntzinger, John Vardian, Brad Leakey, Ray Merritt, Darrell Wiseman, Gary Tigges, Larry Contreras, and John Shadron.

The program consisted of 40 hours of classroom prior to air dropping us into downtown Puerto Vallarta for a week immersion. There, the students interacted with the Red Cross, Regional Hospital, P.V. Firefighters, and Critica Movil (a private ambulance company), for four hour clinicals each day. For two weeks the "Phoenix Eleven" walked the walk and talked the talk

(in Spanish no less), with our south of the border contemporaries. We lived and worked in this community...exchanging cultural, emergency medical, and language skills shoulder to shoulder with our new amigos. We treated patients (lots of scorpion stings), rode the rigs on code 3 responses, (which in Spanish means "hang on and cross your white-knuckled fingers"), killed African bees with soapy water and a few "Hail Marys," and eagerly offered our gringo assistance wherever needed.

As part of the cultural exchange, the "Phoenix Eleven" lived with individual Mexican families. Of primary significance



Waitresses (center foreground), from the cafe where morning briefings occurred, join the group for a picture. PFD members are (left to right): Natelle Huntzinger, Darrell Wiseman, Larry Contreras, Gary Tigges, Brad Leakey, Rick Garner, John Shadron, John Vardian, Carlos Pisano, Jim Mabry.

here, was the sharing of "la comida" (the huge afternoon meal) with our respective families. These sumptuous, five course dinners were from approximately 2:00 to 5:00 every afternoon, and made us all realize the importance of the Mexican siesta shortly thereafter.

While our Mexican brothers and sisters may not have the equipment and training that we take for granted, one couldn't help but be impressed with their attitude and work ethic. We actually made our own 4 x 4's out of large rolls of gauze with the Red Cross! Here, we just go to the EMS locker and rip open a package. You know the EMS equipment that we dispose of after each use? They will reuse it over and over again until it falls apart. Then they'll tape it up and use it again.

This was one of those experiences that had to be lived to be appreciated. We learned more than just a different language. I think we all walked away with a broader perspective of our jobs and of the many different people we serve. ■

John Shadron