



Leading, Loving and Serving Others

HERO AWARD WINNER

The Mateo Family

LEADERSHIP

IBOs Joan and Beatriz Mateo may not have known it at the time, but when each began volunteering for the nonprofit Service for Peace, it would change the course of their careers – and personal lives.

Theirs is a story of love and commitment to each other, but also love and commitment to leading communities through Service for Peace. The organization offers training, resources and volunteers to local citizens who want to make sustainable changes in their neighborhoods. Classrooms have been built to improve schools, levees constructed to prevent flooding and small businesses launched to help families support themselves, among other projects.

For their passion to lead and empower others, Joan and Beatriz are being honored with the Amway Family Hero Award for Leadership.

Their journey started with a simple willingness to step in and help.

Joan was just 17 when he began volunteering for Service for Peace. It was exciting, he said, to be helping people solve problems. “I fell in love with the children and the aging adults while I was serving them and saw a change in them – even if it was just a smile,” Joan said. “To me, being a volunteer was an extraordinary experience. It had a great impact on me.”

A few years later, he met Beatriz in a college class. Since he was still involved with Service for Peace, Joan asked Beatriz to help with a fundraiser. She said yes. At the time, she didn’t know how it would affect her life and career. The couple’s personalities clicked. They kept volunteering together and fell in love along the way.

Service for Peace continued to play an important role in their lives. When the organization decided to permanently establish in the Dominican Republic, Joan became its executive director; later, Beatriz became communication manager.

After studying publicity in college, Beatriz’s original plans were to work for a private company after graduation. But shifting her energy toward social service helped her gain perspective on her career choice. “It was being in the environment of volunteering and helping others that gave me the realization that I truly had a different calling,” Beatriz said. >

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JOAN MATEO



Volunteers and community members build a water tank in the Dominican Republic.

LEADING, TEACHING, INSPIRING

Joan and Beatriz’s volunteering paved the way for the work they do today to lead communities through life-changing projects.

It’s challenging work, but they love it – especially when it makes a difference in the lives of families. An example is a Service for Peace project in the Dominican Republic community of La Rosa. Obtaining clean water is a challenge for the 500 residents there, with some people walking long distances and having to carry water in buckets back to their homes.

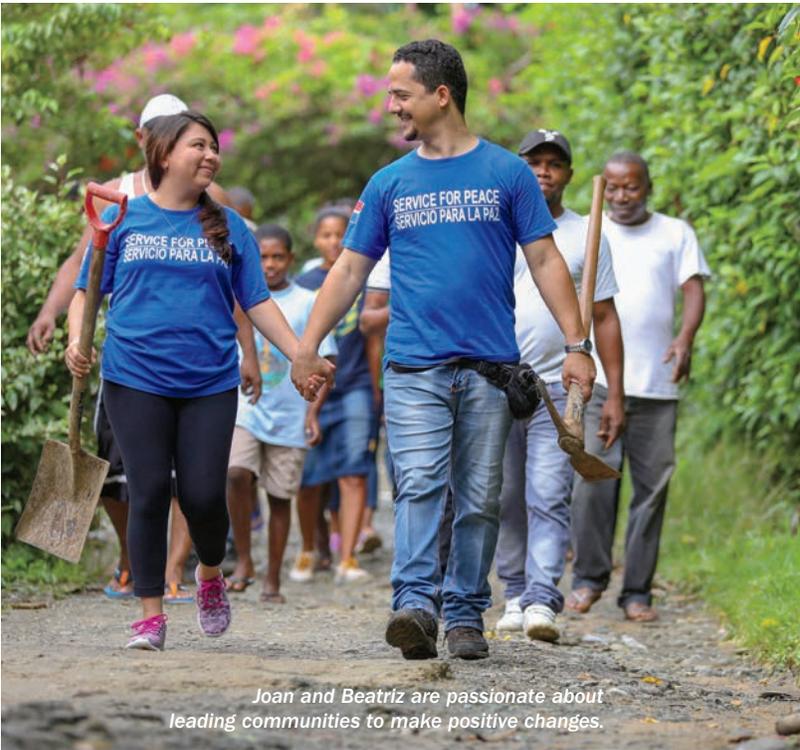
Through Service for Peace, Joan and Beatriz helped the community identify local leaders, develop a plan and acquire resources to build a water tank that the entire community can use. Empowering local leaders is an important part of the work, making the project sustainable for the long term. “It’s like, ‘I don’t want to give you the fish, but I will teach you how to fish,’” Joan said. “They are doing the work; we are simply the means. My passion is to see how the people can resolve their own situation.”

In the beginning, Beatriz said, they provide leadership and work closely with people, but the goal is to step back and have the local citizens take over. “We guide them and show them how to do things, but not do things for them,” Beatriz said. “That way they value more what they have. They can do something for their community and inspire more people to do the same.”

It’s so exciting, they said, to lead a group of people by mentoring and encouraging them.

“That motivates me, to see that there are people who want to get ahead, but don’t have the tools to do it,” Joan said. He cited the Service for Peace cocoa cooperative project in the El Cidral neighborhood in the Dominican Republic as an example. Women who had been earning less than a dollar per month are now creating cocoa products and earning more than \$20 a month, allowing them to better support their families.

“They are the ones identifying their own needs and setting out to work on them, and when I see that, it fills me with a lot of energy and passion,” Joan said. “When they see the work done, they say it was Service for Peace. But they are the ones who did it – that makes me happy.”



Joan and Beatriz are passionate about leading communities to make positive changes.

Oscar Oviedo, a friend and mentor to the couple, said Joan and Beatriz have a special way of making a difference and leading others to do the same. “They both have a love for service and giving themselves to others,” Oscar said. “It’s quite inspiring to see how their work impacts entire families.”

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

As they navigate the work of empowering people, Joan and Beatriz each have different, but complementary, personalities. “Joan has a lot of enthusiasm and he inspires people through his leadership and the way that he is,” said Alejandro Cabrera, Beatriz’s brother, who is program and projects manager for Service for Peace. “He really motivates the community to do what they need to do.”

Beatriz is the opposite, Alejandro said, “but in a good way because of her calmness. She always keeps things in order and always makes sure everything is the way it should be. It’s a balance between them and it really works well.”

Although their styles are different, they each make important connections in a community. Those connections form the foundation for empowering the local citizens to be leaders. Joan explained, “I might say, ‘Do you remember the time you were talking with the mayor and you said, ‘We need this, we need that, how can you help us?’” That is leadership. At the same time, you are teaching the rest of the community that they have the power to connect with others and you teach them to connect, too.”

Joan and Beatriz make it a point to personally get to know the families they work with. “That’s the key,” Joan said. “When we go into a community, it’s not just a meeting. We go inside their house, eat with them, talk with them about what their dreams are and what they want for their kids.”

It’s especially wonderful when kids witness changes in a community, Beatriz said, because it teaches them that they have the power to change their future. “We love to motivate young people,” she continued. “It’s like we’re creating little leaders. They will grow up in their country and you never



Joan and Beatriz lead a discussion with local citizens and Service for Peace volunteers.



Joan and Beatriz sit near a levee they helped a community build to prevent flooding.

know who that person will be in the future. Maybe we’ll have a future president – someone who will make a big impact.”

Building those relationships is so gratifying, Beatriz said. “It’s knowing that these are not just people you help, but who become part of your family,” she said. “It isn’t that we are giving them something specific, like a home. It’s that what gets done is for the good of the whole community. To see the smiles on the faces of the people when their need has been met – to me, that is the most rewarding.” ■