



COURTESY OF EMILY GOVEL

On one of Emily Govel's first trips to Nicaragua, she helped bring water to a school in Chacraseca, just east of the city of Leon.



COURTESY OF EMILY GOVEL

Children in Chacraseca, Nicaragua loved to entice Emily Govel to play a game of tag on a daily basis.



COURTESY OF EMILY GOVEL

During her recent three month stay in Nicaragua, Emily Govel organized a trip for her family and friends, including her brother Spencer, to Chacraseca.

### MANASQUAN'S EMILY GOVEL

# Jersey native offers a 'hand-up' out of poverty to Nicaragua community

BY KATIE LOBOSCO  
THE COAST STAR

There is a small group of budding entrepreneurs in a Nicaragua farming community called Chacraseca — more than 1,800 miles away from Manasquan's shoreline and, what one could say, worlds apart.

But that group of high school students has Manasquan native Emily Govel to thank for their exposure to the business world and a push towards becoming financially savvy.

Ms. Govel, 23, has implemented a youth business program in Chacraseca in which enrolled students take a business course, team up with a mentor, and initiate and control their own internal savings and lending group.

Attaining financial skills and having access to loans are not things to be taken lightly in a community where most families' average daily income amounts of about \$2. Often, there is little money to put away in savings.

Ms. Govel returned home in mid-May after spending almost three months in Chacraseca — only because she would have needed a visa three days later. Although she visited several times during college with groups of her peers from James Madison University, this time she traveled to Nicaragua by herself.

"I was really there to learn, for three months I just wanted to learn," Ms. Govel said last week upon her return. She lived with a Nicaraguan family — hearing and seeing their needs first-hand — and worked with the local nonprofit group in Chacraseca called San Isidro.

Ask Ms. Govel what she learned during her stay and she will say she is still trying to fully grasp the impact of her trip. But two aspects of her stay in Chacraseca immediately stand out.

First, giving someone in need a "hand-up," instead of a "hand-out" goes a long way. For years and years, aid from the developed world came in the form of money, clothing and new homes — all for free. "That doesn't help them get out of poverty, that's just a hand-out," Ms. Govel said.

Over the past few years, she has seen a shift in the way Nicaraguans view aid. The mindset is changing away from expecting to receive items as gifts towards expecting to work for them, she said.

Second, Ms. Govel learned how talent is universal, yet opportunity is not. "People are so talented, but the opportunity is just not there," she said.

#### DISCOVERING HER PASSION

Ms. Govel's recent three-month stay in Nicaragua was years in the making.

The daughter of Stephen and Lisa Govel, Ms. Govel graduated from Manasquan High School in 2007.

Although reluctant at first, Ms. Govel said her parents are "really supportive" of her travels.



JOSEPH J. DELCONZO THE COAST STAR

**"I was really there to learn, for three months I just wanted to learn."**

EMILY GOVEL On her stay in Chacraseca, Nicaragua

Her older brother Stephen is now 26 years old and her younger brother Spencer is 17 years old.

Ms. Govel attended James Madison University, located in Harrisonburg, Va., where she was interested in pursuing a degree in social work, yet her father was an advocate for a business degree.

She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in business administration. She focused her studies on international business and took classes to fulfill a minor in nonprofit studies and Spanish.

During college, Ms. Govel traveled to Chacraseca three times, often during spring break. The groups helped build homes and schools. By the time she was a senior she was helping to organize and fundraise for the trips and had made her own connections in the Central American country.

After graduating in 2011, Ms. Govel knew she wanted to continue traveling, but with a purpose. She wanted to get a job first. So she searched hard for an internship — which she landed with Kiva, an international nonprofit group which aims to alleviate poverty by connecting those in need of funds with loans.

"I've been in love with Kiva ever since college," she said.

Kiva allows individuals to loan as little as \$25, through its website kiva.org. It will then be lent at a zero-percent interest rate to those microfinance institutions in developing countries, which then passes the loan along to a person, there, in need of access to capital. Those interested in giving a loan can search the website for a person they want the money to go to. The website posts pictures and small biographies of those seeking a

loan, explaining what kind of business venture the money will be used for.

One hundred percent of the loan is provided to these people, who typically do not have access to traditional banking systems.

Since 2005, more than 770,000 people have become lenders through Kiva, creating \$317 million in loans. The repayment rate to the lenders is 98.4 percent.

Ms. Govel was determined on working with the group. In order to land the position, she attended an academic conference about microfinance in the developing world in New York City, in search of Kiva employees. She wanted to attend so badly, her boyfriend — Kevin Zeigler, of Virginia — bought her a ticket to the conference for her birthday.

Her strategy worked. Not only did she network at the conference with the right people, but made a lasting impression. Soon after, she applied for a competitive, unpaid internship and landed the job.

Ms. Govel moved to San Francisco, the location of Kiva headquarters, and the work there confirmed her passion and wish to work with a microfinance institution.

Microfinance institutions located in developing countries serve as the middle man, making sure a loan someone in the United States makes to Kiva gets to the entrepreneur in the developing country, hoping to expand their business with the new capital. Generally, microfinance institutions exist in areas with low-income individuals and where there is no access to typical banking services.

Microfinance groups operate on the principal that low-income indi-

viduals are capable of lifting themselves out of poverty, given some financial services. Often, microfinance institutions require those receiving a loan to take classes and learn how to manage their finances before they are approved for a loan.

"In microfinance, people are getting a loan, but that person is paying it back — with interest. So you're not actually handing out anything," Ms. Govel said.

For six months, she worked with the Global Partnership Team at Kiva. Ms. Govel researched the economy, government and any existing microfinance institutions in places where Kiva is hoping to expand its services.

She finished in February and could not wait to use what she learned in the office in the "real world." Just a few weeks later was back on a plane flying to Nicaragua.

Ms. Govel used her contacts from her previous trips and her new contacts from Kiva to organize her trip and find a family to stay with.

"I was itching to go," she said.

#### FINDING A WAY TO MEET A NEED

For the past three months, Ms. Govel made it her mission to talk to as many people in the community of Chacraseca as possible and learn about their needs.

Although she loved the abundance of mangos — children there came to know her as the "Queen of the Mangos" — she may never get used to taking a shower with a bucket of water or the large cockroaches which could keep people in Nicaragua up at night.

She worked closely with the nonprofit group there, San Isidro, and

helped organize the trips for a number of various charitable groups that visit Chacraseca each year.

What she learned, however, was that the community had become dependent on the hand-outs the groups have come with for years and years.

"When a bunch of foreigners come in, all people see are dollars signs. It creates a society of beggars," Ms. Govel said.

Starting in 2009, San Isidro is trying to change that mindset. Now when groups come to help build new homes for people in Chacraseca, the Nicaraguans must pay for 25-percent of the costs to build the house. That money goes back into a fund set up by San Isidro for house maintenance in the future. When clothes are donated to the community, the nonprofit sets up a bazaar to sell the items, rather than just give them out. Profits from the sale go into a fund earmarked for infrastructure maintenance and creation.

One day, when talking to a bee keeper named Fabritizo, Ms. Govel got an idea.

"He had a great business model, but he just lacked the capital to expand," she said. His honey tasted great, he was an intelligent businessman and imagined him exporting, Ms. Govel said.

Ms. Govel decided to try and give an opportunity to students who attend high school on Saturdays in Chacraseca. These are the students that may already have their own business and work during the week to provide for their family. Thus, Ms. Govel said, they already have some form of income.

With help from San Isidro, Ms. Govel hired a director and teacher for a group of 18 students interested in participating in a youth business program. They are currently taking one business class, are pairing up with local business men and women, and creating their own internal savings and lending group.

The group is comparable to a small version of a microfinance institution.

The students created their own constitutions and rules for the lending group, explained Ms. Govel. Each person must contribute between 10 and 30 cordobas — about 50 cents to \$1.50. If one of the group members wishes to take out a loan, they must present their plan to the group — which will decide as a whole if the loan will be granted.

The loan must be paid back, with interest. Thus, the program teaches the students to save and gives them access to capital.

One student, Ms. Govel said, delivers milk at 3 a.m. each day. With access to capital, he may be able to expand his business — delivering more milk each morning.

Ms. Govel implemented the program just a few weeks before she left Nicaragua, but the director checks in with her as frequently as possible.

Ms. Govel hopes to go back to Nicaragua sometime in the fall. Until then, she's back in Manasquan, but planning for her next adventure.