

STORY &amp; PHOTOS BY SHERRY BALDWIN

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## MORNING STAR FISHERMEN, INC. FEEDING COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE GLOBE



(L to R) Marcia Mayorga, Student Intern, Hans Geissler, MSF Founder, Ivania Ruiz, Student Intern, and Domingo Rayo, Student Intern.

Born into a large family in 1941 Germany, Hans Geissler, co-founder of Morning Star Fishermen, Inc. in Dade City, stated that he "didn't have to read a book to know of poverty." He lived it. As he grew into adulthood, he became a successful boat builder and plumbing contractor. He and his wife, Sigrid, enjoyed the many treasures that came with their successes. Yet, several years ago, following a trip to an impoverished area, Geissler experienced what some may consider a spiritual awakening. He became aware of the global nutritional deficit called protein malnourishment.

What he found was that this malnourishment affects millions of people and their communities both physically and mentally. Born out of a need to address this issue of world hunger, Morning Star Fishermen, Inc. (MSF) was founded in 1993. Armed with the knowledge that fish are known to be a high source of protein, MSF's mission continues to be that of combating malnutrition

throughout the world by the promotion of Tilapia aquaculture (the raising of fish) on a small to medium scale.

Hans Geissler has often been quoted as saying, "Give a man a fish and he eats for one day – teach a man to raise fish and the whole community eats." It is based on this premise that he operates MSF at its current location in Dade City. Situated on 11 acres is a fish hatchery, training center and dormitory housing, as well as a modest home where Hans and Sigrid Geissler reside. MSF brings students from all over the world to participate in aquaculture (the raising of fish) and hydroponics (the raising of vegetables). Both short term and residential programs are offered.

Participants graduate with the knowledge necessary to teach their own community members to build fish farms in order to breed, raise and also sell Tilapia. Tilapia, also known as St. Peter's fish, was cho-

sen because they are said to be easy to raise, grow rapidly, produce year around, and are plant eating, hardy fish. MSF students are also learning how to raise ornamental fish (such as the Oscar or Koi) in effort to provide another source of community income.

Hillsborough Community College's (HCC) 24-month aquaculture program is one example of an internship opportunity offered through MSF. Students such as Ivania Ruiz from Nicaragua and Marcia Mayorga of Honduras will soon graduate and return to their home countries and are eager to teach others what they have learned. "The technology is not difficult", stated Mayorga. Both women agree that simplicity is imperative to the process. They also describe how they have learned to grow and harvest "duck weed" to feed their fish, therefore replacing the need for costly fish food. They have also learned about aquaponics, which is the use of fish wastewater to grow vegetables.

Also participating in the HCC program is Domingo Rayo of Nicaragua. He stated that he is "very happy" to have made the decision to participate. While he is relatively new to the program, he looks forward to taking what he will learn back to his community, as well. Geissler adds that MSF is not limited to international students. In fact, he is collaborating with various communities in an effort to teach aquaculture domestically. MSF also provides valuable mission work opportunities for those churches/organizations interested.

Hans Geissler realizes that in a world of competing "causes" he must continue to think of innovative fundraising ideas. Drawing from his background in boat building, Geissler will use sailboats as a platform for fighting world hunger. "Much like in NASCAR," Geissler explains, "individuals or corporations will own the sailboats. Corporate sponsors will advertise on the sails of these racing boats. The sponsorship fees will be used to fight world hunger." His hope is to eventually build between 200-500 of these Formula 16 sailboats for this purpose. While he avoids discussion of being affiliated with one specific religious organization, he freely speaks in terms of spirituality and faith. He stated that he does have faith that funding for Morning Star Fishermen and its efforts will continue to flow.

Morning Star Fishermen, Inc. is located at 33336 Old Saint Joe Road, Dade City, FL 33525. Donations of all kinds (please contact for wish list) are gratefully accepted. Additionally, Hans Geissler is available to speak at your church, retreat, special event, men's group or small group meeting. For more information, please call (352) 523-2722, or visit them on the web at [www.morningstarfishermen.org](http://www.morningstarfishermen.org).