

# SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 13

Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project

October 2000

## Chacocente Project Initiated

### Peter Smith is Sister City Representative in Nicaragua

By Rob Horwich

Peter Smith, Sister City Project member from Hillsboro, WI, has formally initiated work within the villages around the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge in the Municipality of Santa Teresa. Peter becomes the organization's first representative to be living full time in Santa Teresa. Peter left for Nicaragua in July to begin language studies in Esteli. During the latter part of August, Martin Clearfield and I joined Peter in Santa Teresa.

The initial phase of the project began by gathering information on both the professional interests and the community interests in Chacocente. Information was gathered on the current status of work and interest in Chacocente in meetings with representatives of the Alcaldia de SantaTeresa, MARENA (Ministerio de Ambiente y Recursos Naturales), UNA (Univeridad Nacional Agraria), UCA, Universidad Centro America,Nicambiental, GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit) and Fauna and Flora, International. Once initial information was obtained, the group performed a networking function by disseminating the gathered information to all interested groups. They additionally, attended a number of meetings by COMAREN, a commission of interested groups, who meet regularly at Chacocente to discuss the future of the reserve. In addition to members of MARENA and representatives of the communities, the meetings were attended by members of the Army, Nicambiental, and GTZ.

Finally, we went to Chacocente every week for 3-4 days in order to meet the villagers from villages within the refuge including towns of Papilon, La Palma and Vera Cruz. This will lay the foundation to begin a dialogue with what kind of project the villagers would be interested in. Peter became interested in the possibility of helping the villages of Papilon and La Palma to set up a modest building to house tourists and researchers who would come to study the refuge. The feedback was very positive from the local people and Peter will hope to present the idea to the sister city members when he returns. If it sounds like a good possibility then a site will have to be selected and a proposal will have to be submitted to MARENA for approval.

Peter also had an idea for an alternative model farm center, which would explore alternative farming for area farmers. This farm could develop methods of farming which would be appropriate for the dry forest area that would help reduce the pressures on the tropical dry forest. Such a farm would probably be located in the buffer zone outside of the reserve.

A small start for the education program came about when Bayardo Quintero suggested that MARENA might have the money to finance printing of a coloring book to be distributed to the Santa Teresa schools and possibly for the schools around La Flor and Isla Juan Venado, two other dry forests with turtle nesting beaches. Discussions with Francisco Reyes of Nicambiental led to an agreement to work together on this project. Community Conservation, Inc. has permission from the Center for Marine Conservation in Washington D.C. to reprint a 30 page coloring book that they have written in English and Spanish with well done drawings on sea turtles. Jane Furchgott and I have already begun planning an additional 20 pages on the Pacific dry forests of Nicaragua and some specifics on the olive ridley turtles which nest at Chacocente.

*Dr. Rob Horwich is the director of Community Conservation, Inc., Gays Mills, WI.*

### October 27 Benefit

The Sister City Project's annual fall Burrito Supper and old-time dance will take place at 6 PM on Friday evening October 27. Come out to Blue Highways (old Masonic Temple), 165 N. Central, Richland Center, and enjoy yourselves while raising money for people and sea turtles in Santa Teresa. The meal will feature tortillas and all the fixings, Central American style rice, and delicious homemade desserts. Starting at 8:00, the Kettle Creek String Band will play and call old time dance music--including squares, reels, polkas, and waltzes. Dances are taught and all ages are welcome.

The suggested donation of \$7.00 per adult or \$4.00 per child includes both dinner and dance. Reduced rates can be negotiated for those who can't attend both events; family rates are also available. All proceeds after expenses will go directly to support the work of the Sister City Project.

## Impressions of Nicaragua

By Martin Clearfield

Arriving at night in Managua, Nicaragua, one becomes aware of the street lights shining onto the airport road. "new lights" the taxicab driver remarked. "What else is different from two years ago?" I asked. "Well", he mused many businesses have reopened and they continue to do so every day, but really nothing is different. "Oh, yes," he continued, things are definitely not any better. The Liberals steal, the Sandinistas steal; it was better during Somoza." The cabby went on talking about politics and that after expenses he earned \$10.00 for a 10 to 12 hour day of downtown driving. In my memory, as he told me of his earnings, I recalled that as a teenager working construction 45 years ago, I also earned \$10.00 a day.

The newspapers were replete with articles about government fraud, ecological disasters, beauty queens and the upcoming mayoral elections throughout the country. Jose Martinez is not going to serve a third term preferring to be the Sandinista candidate for the state of Carazo in the national elections for congress next year. One of Jose's favorite political expressions was that he wanted to be "transparent". He used that adjective at each of the five meetings I observed.

On the home front in Santa Teresa, the Mayor was again gracious and always helpful in Rob's ecological mission, or Peter's agricultural pursuit or my educational interests. We delivered the usual cache of common medicines from Dr. Bard and preschool supplies from Bonnie Wright of Discovery Play School. Bonnie also included some needed cash for the preschool teacher, Teresa Acevedo Dinete to purchase common items such as pencils, crayons and paper. At the mayor's house Rob, Peter and I ate beans and rice (gallo pinto) every day with fish and salad or other vegetables; however, outside of the mayors domain, most people, including us, ate gallo pinto with added viands only on occasion. There is food but it costs.

At Chacocente (the turtle and dry forest reserve within the municipality of Santa Teresa), there was not a first harvest due to a severe drought. When I left at the beginning of September the rains had finally arrived bringing hope for a second harvest of beans and vegetables. A newspaper article appeared quoting Martinez' concern that the federal government was not going to help the local farmers during the drought. The reason he gave was that Santa Teresa was a Sandinista stronghold. Germane to this lack of federal funds for Santa Teresa was the complaint by the public employees of the Mayor's office who had not received their salary for many months. Peter Smith received a solemn letter signed by the employees stating their lack of salary and asking if Peter could help out in this matter through the sister-city connection. Peter

explained how limited our funds were and explained how they were being used. The Mayor himself has not taken a salary for over two years.

Nevertheless, the one consistent, positive feeling I encountered was the gratitude people from Santa Teresa expressed about the longevity of the sister city relationship. This relationship opened bureaucratic doors when we wanted to talk about the turtle reserve; people were glad to see us return and asked about the folks here in Richland County (Neil, Jane and all who have attended the benefits and donated time and money. Often I could detect that the local people of Santa Teresa, although appreciative of the money and supplies, were even more grateful of the person to person relationships developed over the past twelve years. To use another word, it was the Solidarity we felt that mattered.

*Marty Clearfield is a member of the Sister City project. He lives in rural Richland County.*

## My First Three Months in Nicaragua

By Peter Smith

The first order of business for me was a month of intensive Spanish language school in Estili. I have had some experience with Spanish in the past, but I found for sure it is going to take me more than one month to bring me up to power. An old dog learning new tricks, but we are gaining.

During language school, I made two trips to Santa Teresa to deliver funds and medicines to Mayor Jose Martinez and to get acquainted more formally and discuss future possibilities. Jose is a very friendly and dedicated person, and a very busy man, particularly with the mayoral elections coming up in early November. He gave me what time he could but, quite frankly, my developing a more complete relationship with him will have to wait until he is not under such intense political pressures and until my Spanish is more in tune with his complicated thinking and problems. The majority of the Sister City funds at this time were used to help farmers of the Ag Coop who were in a very difficult situation due to the extreme drought in the first half of the growing season. Other funds were applied to the Chacocente Project.

As reported elsewhere, Marty Clearfield and Rob Horwitz arrived in Nicaragua around the 20th of August and I spent several intense weeks with them becoming more familiar with the general situation in the Chacocente Reserve. After they left, I spent two more weeks visiting communities in and around Chacocente.

I will try to summarize some of my distinct impressions from this experience.

- Arnolando Aleman (the current President of Nicaragua) is basically corrupt and promises it be a very important player in the future of Chacocente because a.) he owns in the neighborhood of 4000 acres of land just south east of Chacocente and b.) he is having built at public expense a very impressive highway from Santa Teresa, past the northern part of the Reserve, to his land holdings just mentioned.
- MARENA in cooperation with the Nicaraguan Army are doing a reasonably good job of protecting the park, but with limited budget and a mountain of problems to deal with. New regulations, which they will be mandated to enforce, will tend to negatively affect many communities in and around the refuge.
- The community leaders I have talked to are very aware of their precarious situation in relation to their access to turtle eggs and other park resources and are very interested in exploring alternatives.
- The region just north of the Park is extremely rugged (90% of travel is by foot, horseback or, if you are lucky, ox cart). For this reason this area is the poorest and most neglected in the Santa Teresa municipality.
- I believe the Sister City focus should be to work with these above mentioned communities to develop grass roots alternatives so that they do not get marginalized by the powerful regulatory and economic forces which seem to be converging on Chacocente.

This is a very short and quickly prepared summary of a very complicated situation and only hints at the problems and possible solutions. Please stay tuned.

*Peter Smith arrived in Wisconsin just in time to submit this article. He will be in attendance at the Oct 27 benefit and will return to Nicaragua next month.*

### **The Tropical Dry Forest of Chacocente**

Once widespread in Central America, tropical dry forests are the most endangered ecosystems. Dry forests once composed almost half of the existing forests in the Central America lowlands. Today, less than 2% exist, and less than .08% are protected. Chacocente is one of the few tropical dry forest remnants in Central America which has protective status.

Dry forests are defined by water limitation, seasonality, foliage longevity, vegetation structure, substrate, the number of tree stories and their horizontal continuity of each story, and other aspects of forest structure. While

limited by climate, soil types can additionally affect the structure of a dry forest, which can vary from 2 to 30 meters in height. Tropical dry forests are formed as a result of climatic conditions. Prevailing winds, blowing through Central America from the northeast or east to the southwest or west cause an inequality of rainfall due to locality relative to mountainous areas. Regions north or east (windward of the mountains) of the mountains tend to be wet, whereas those to the south or west (leeward) are much drier and more seasonal in precipitation because of the mountain's rain shadow pattern. In Central America the pacific side, where Chacocente is located, is drier than the Caribbean side.

A tropical dry forest has a mean annual rainfall range of 250-2000mm. With mean annual temperatures of above 17 degrees C, the ratio of potential evaporation to precipitation is greater than one to a maximum of 2. Chacocente's dry period extends from December to May; however, this past year they were plagued with a much longer drought. The wettest period is during October and November when it is difficult to reach Chacocente.

Dry forests respond readily to rain. The main growth occurs during the wet season and no growth or even shrinkage occurs in the dry season. Even below the ground this is evident with fine roots shed in the dry season and restored rapidly in the wet season.

Seasonality controls the temporal growth pattern, productivity, organic matter turnover, reproduction and other traits. Although dry forests are often referred to as deciduous, not all dry forests are deciduous and not all deciduous forests are dry. However, Chacocente probably has 60-75% species which shed their leaves during the dry season.

Tropical dry forests usually have only two strata of trees, a canopy about 20-30 meters high and an understory 10-20 meters high. Canopy trees usually have short stout trunks and spreading flat crowns. Many canopy trees have thin compound leaves which are shed during the dry season. The lower story has slender leaning trunks with small open evergreen crowns. There is also a 2-5 meter shrub layer usually multi-stemmed and covered with spines or thorns. Woody or herbaceous vines complement the forest with only a few bromeliad epiphytes. In comparison to wet tropical forests, the water limitation generally gives dry forest slower canopy height, less species diversity, basal area, biomass and production rate but they have an increased root system. They also have a higher proportion of endemic species.

-R.H.

### Project News and Notes

- You can hear the main contributors to this issue in person on Thursday, November 2, as they talk about their recent experiences in Santa Teresa. Peter Smith, who is back in Wisconsin for a few weeks before returning to his work in Nicaragua, along with Rob Horwich and Marty Clearfield, will present a program at the Brewer Library, 325 N. Central, in Richland Center, starting at 7 PM. They will also be showing slides and video of rural Santa Teresa and Chacocente.
- The same three individuals will be interviewed by Ron Fruit on WRCO radio on Tuesday, October 24. They will appear on the Morning Show at 9 AM. WRCO is at 1450 AM and 100.9 FM.
- If you can help with our upcoming benefit on the 27<sup>th</sup> by contributing burrito ingredients, making a dessert, or assisting with serving or cleanup on the night of the supper, please call Peggy Swan at 536-3993 or Jane Furchgott at 583-2431.
- The Sister City Project has applied for Non-Profit status. We are hoping our application will be approved in the near future.
- Active members of the Project meet about once a month. We don't have a regular meeting time, but get together as events and project business warrant. If you want to be on the list to be notified about our meetings, contact Jane Furchgott or email Stein Goering (sgoering@uwc.edu)
- As always, donations to the project will be gratefully accepted. Contributions can be mailed to The Santa Teresa Fund, %Richland County Bank, Box 677, Richland Center, WI 53581, or you can make a deposit in person to our account at the bank. Donations may also be left at the Brewer Library. Checks should be made out to the Santa Teresa Fund.

Richland Center - Santa Teresa  
 Sister City Project  
 %Brewer Library  
 Richland Center, WI 53581



**SISTER CITY BENEFIT**

**Blue Highways - Friday October 27**