

SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 18

Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project

Oct 2002

Fifteen Years of Friendship

Jane Furchgott, SCP president, provided this history in commemoration of the Project's 15th Anniversary.

Fifteen years ago Nicaragua's Sandinista government was under attack by Contra guerrillas. A number of people from the Richland Center area came together in response to the U.S. government's support of the Contras and their terrorist tactics. We wanted to engage with the Nicaraguan people in a positive way.

With the help of the Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua (WCCN), the Nicaraguan embassy matched Richland Center with a sister city -- Santa Teresa, a similar small town surrounded by farm country. Our group accepted the designation in February, 1987.

In the early days our group concentrated on sending material aid to embargo-starved Nicaragua. Clothing, medicine, and school supplies were badly needed. We sponsored speakers to educate people in Wisconsin about the harsh realities of Central America in the 1980s. Some say that the vibrant sister city movement kept President Reagan from using U.S. troops in Nicaragua.

The SCP has encouraged direct meetings between our communities whenever possible. Starting with Kathie Swanson in 1988, over twenty people from the Richland area have traveled to Santa Teresa and been welcomed into its homes. My first visit, in 1989, changed my view of the world. The people of Santa Teresa were poor but generous and unashamed. They had food to eat and hope for the future because of their socialist revolution. I feel sad, thinking of the hunger in Nicaragua now. In the capital city, begging children are everywhere, while in 1989 walking all over Managua I was only accosted once, by a little girl who asked me for a pencil.

(cont on Page 3)



Vidal Reyes stands beside the repaired well at La Poma. The inscription on the well reads:

"Piter Smith Hermanamiento Wisconsin 2002"

Transition in Chacocente

Peter Smith's Report

Peter has been the Sister City Project's representative in Santa Teresa since the fall of 2000.

As some of you already know, I've been making plans to return to my farm and family in Hillsboro, Wisconsin in January 2003. This return has been motivated by a variety of factors, including the simple fact that my family and community need me in the face of a period of unprecedented world uncertainty. Many of the *campesinos* I work with in Nicaragua are very troubled by the current situation and the implications for their lives. I feel it is a moment calling for deep reflection.

"I wanted a better nation; therefore I sought to strengthen my family. I wanted to improve my community; therefore I strove to discipline myself." --Chinese proverb

This essentially is the place I find myself in at this time. It also summarizes the focus of my efforts over the last 2 1/2 years as Sister City representative in Santa Teresa, where I was requested to work with the villages in and around the Chacocente refuge. In my small way I have tried to strengthen the families and communities of the area. This article summarizes some of the projects we have undertaken. I also present my proposal for the transition of my responsibilities to a Nicaraguan representative, Leonidas Grijalva, who I feel will enable us to effectively continue our program after I leave.

First, I want to consider the question of what causes prosperity. Many people think Costa Rica is prosperous because it has tourism and that therefore tourism is the answer for Nicaragua. I disagree. Costa Rica is prosperous and reasonably stable for more fundamental reasons: It has a favorable climate, long growing season, and, most importantly, universal health-care and education, which enable the *campesinos* to participate fully in the economic and political life of the nation. Most of Nicaragua has a much harsher climate and its scandalously poor health-care and education effectively excludes large masses of *campesinos* from the economical and political life of the nation. Tourism will not change this, nor, in my opinion, bring general prosperity and stability to Nicaragua. And we can't change the climate. But we can do things to improve education and healthcare.

ESCALANTE SCHOOL Using purchased materials and community labor, we have helped build a six-by-twelve meter, two-classroom schoolhouse where no school existed before, benefiting about 25 families and 50 students. I really enjoyed working with the community on this one.

(continued on Page 2)

(Transition, continued from Page 1)



Escalante community members work on grading outside the new school. Construction costs were funded with a \$2000 donation from a SCP supporter.

HEALTH CENTER, COMMUNITY HERB GARDENS, AND TRAINING We have built a small health center (with kitchen) between the villages of El Papalon and El Palma that is used for training health promoters, production and storage of natural medicines, dental exams, community meetings and local gatherings. Community herb gardens have been started in two of the four villages (El Papalon and Escalante). Also, a local and well-qualified natural health practitioner has been training community health promoters in this field. These activities will not be a silver bullet for the many health problems, but at least they are placing -- in the hands of their own people -- affordable and understandable resources to make improvements in a very difficult situation.

WELLS AND PUMPS In the three-month, March-through-June cycle we provided materials for about 15 wells and the installation of about six rope pumps. Improving the quality and quantity of domestic water is a key to better health, as chronic kidney infection and disease are prime problems. Rope pumps improve the quality of the water dramatically by permitting the sealing of the well-tops against outside debris.

CHICKEN PROJECT With help from the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, we provided materials for hen houses, bought feed, purchased one rooster and ten hens, and paid for veterinarian services for three communities. Leonidas has been working closely with this project—which we hope to be self-sustaining at some point—and is looking forward to the first batch of baby chicks.

COMMUNITY LIFE By following a policy of our providing the materials and the communities providing the labor, we insure that the communities really want whatever projects we decide on. Also, in order to get the work done the necessary steps of community organization and consensus building are undertaken. All communities and leaders are not equal, however, and just as in American communities, constant effort is required to keep things on track.

SEA TURTLES Illegal trafficking of sea turtle eggs continues to be a major problem. We held a meeting with the fishermen of El Astillero (some of whom are engaged

in the slaughter of turtles in the ocean front of Chacocente to extract their eggs). The mayors of Santa Teresa and Tola, and the vice-mayor of Jinotepe also attended, along with representatives of MARENA and the army. As a result of this meeting and a report of illegal trafficking, completed in April, MARENA has appointed a new director of the Chacocente Park, whom I feel has real promise to effectively confront the illegal trafficking. Also, our patrol boat is finally back in use with the cooperation of a diverse group of players, and while there are complications, I am optimistic the boat patrol will have an impact on the turtle slaughter.

AG PROGRAMS The community gardens, micro irrigation, organic methods and soil conservation are still ongoing priorities, with a local agronomist (who accompanies the trainer of the health promoters) working with the *campesinos* in all these areas. The combination of poor soil, a multitude of insects and a harsh climate make progress slow, but, frankly, chronic hunger on the part of the *campesino* families keeps their interest up.



Ramiro Obando with cabbages in his La Poma garden.

TRANSITION When I arrived in Nicaragua in July 2000 I didn't know how long I would stay. Now, the deteriorating world situation, coupled with my encountering a qualified Nicaraguan that could take over my responsibilities in Santa Teresa have persuaded me to return to my family and our farm. At this point I don't think anyone knows what the future holds, but I will be trying to strengthen my family while maintaining close contacts with our efforts in Nicaragua, where the poor are almost inevitably the first to suffer in world convulsions. José Leonidas Grijalva, 34, married with 3 children, born, raised and presently living in the Chacocente area, ex-head of Protected Areas for MARENA-Carazo (of which Chacocente and Santa Teresa are part) is uniquely qualified to take over my job. Young, enthusiastic, environmentally and socially conscious, and knowledgeable, he has good relationships with *campesinos* and officials. The Sister City Project arranged for him to visit the R.C. area from Oct. 4 – 11. He stayed with several Spanish speaking families and met many of the members of the Sister City Project.

(continued on Page 3)

(Transition, continued from Page 2)

During the next three months--until January--we will be working on contract relations with Leonidas and a Nicaraguan committee made up of the Mayor's Office, Leonidas, and a variety of community leaders to act as an oversight and advisory group for our projects. I have a high degree of confidence in this arrangement.

I have made several close friends in Nicaragua and it is my heartfelt desire to see our programs continue in the service of their fellow communities. I feel blessed to have found a man of Leonidas' caliber to take over this effort for me.

CONCLUSION I would like to say it has been a privilege working as the Sister City representative and a heavy duty learning experience for me—in terms of the language, culture, climate and poverty of Nicaragua, as well as interactions between me and the group in the U.S. Despite all our false starts and missteps (my own among the most prominent) I feel it has been a truly rewarding experience.

One final thought: The world stands on the brink. The United States is in a unique position to exert true moral leadership. She is also in a position to resort to brutish force, to answer blood with yet more blood. All Americans, in my view (and in the view of our brother and sister *campesinos* in Nicaragua) need to profoundly reflect on what this means.



Etermilde Prudente teaches community health promoters about herbs and natural healing

Variety Show Benefit November 2

The Variety Show is back for another year with an evening of fast-paced fun, featuring a wide variety of acts with performers of all ages. This benefit for the Sister City Project will be held at Blue Highways on Saturday, November 2 at 7:30 pm.

All acts are welcome as long as they don't exceed ten minutes in length. There is still time to sign up and share your talents. Call organizers Peggy Swan and Ron Solinger at 536-3993.

Thanks: David Rhodes, Jane Furchgott and Stein Goering for production help and Advanced Technology Solutions of Richland Center for the use of their printing equipment.

(Friendship, continued from Page 2)

In 1990 Nicaragua's national elections were scrutinized by the world. SCP member Tom Bachman went to Santa Teresa as an election observer. In a surprising upset, conservative Violeta Chamorro won over the incumbent Sandinista President Daniel Ortega.

Nicaragua's presidency has stayed conservative ever since.

In Santa Teresa we've worked with four different mayors, all Sandinistas except for the incumbent, conservative Porfirio Cortez, who was elected in 1998. The Sister City Project has remained engaged through these changes. Our work transcends political labels. Our representative, Peter Smith, has very different views than Mayor Cortez but works well with him anyway. Peter sees the mayor as honest and caring about his people.

Other highlights of our work in the 1990's include our association with Jader Castro, a health promoter at the Santa Teresa Clinic. He visited Richland Center in 1992 and emphasized the need for clean water in the rural areas. Working with him we raised money for wells, latrines, and health education.

The Sister City relationship became official in 1995 after Richland Center Mayor Tom McCarthy traveled to Santa Teresa with Neil Bard. That trip also inspired Dr. Bard to begin a continuing program of sending medical supplies to Santa Teresa.

In 1997 Neil Bard received a passionate letter from Mayor Jose Martinez asking our help in protecting the sea turtles at Chacocente Wildlife Refuge. We were able to recruit the aid of biologist and co-management expert Dr. Rob Horwich to advise us. We have concentrated on the welfare of Chacocente and its communities ever since.

In 2000, Hillsboro farmer and mechanic Peter Smith visited Chacocente on a WCCN tour and subsequently contacted our group. Peter eventually volunteered to be our representative in Nicaragua and has been working in Santa Teresa for over two years.

Peter's commitment encouraged our group to adopt a formal structure with a board and bylaws. We achieved non-profit status in late 2000.

Since then we've increased our fund-raising efforts, attempting to keep up with the projects Peter has organized. We (and the Chacocente villagers) have been fortunate to have such an energetic, capable, and generous man as our first representative in Nicaragua. See Peter's article in this issue for a report on some of his undertakings.

As Peter returns to his family in Wisconsin next year, we look forward to continuing our work with our new Nicaraguan representative, Leonidas Grijalva.

Special Notice: A taped interview with Leonidas will be aired on WRCO Radio's Morning Show at 9:10 AM on Monday, Oct 14. Tune your dial to 100.9 FM or 1450 AM.

Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project
P.O. Box 483
Richland Center, WI 53581

Nonprofit Org.
US Postage
PAID
Permit # 48
R.C. WI 53581

8TH ANNUAL BURRITO SUPPER AND DANCE

Friday, Oct 18

Supper 5:30-7:30, Dance 8:00

Blue Highways, 165 N. Central, R.C.

Tortillas, fillings, salsas, rice, desserts

**Music by Paul Biere and the
Last Minute String Band
square & contra dance**

**Suggested Donation: \$8.00 Adults,
\$4.00 Children under 12**

All proceeds support our work in Santa Teresa

Sea Turtle Coloring Book

The SCP has just published an educational coloring book, "The Tropical Dry Forests & Sea Turtle Beaches of Nicaragua's Pacific Coast" This bilingual 52-Page book includes sections about Chacocente's dry forest and sea turtles. The text was written by Rob Horwich, with illustrations by Jane Furchgott. Included in the center of the book is a reprint of "Sea Turtles", a beautiful coloring book by the Center for Marine Conservation.

Our coloring book was printed for distribution in the Chacocente area schools, to help children understand, appreciate, and take pride in their local ecosystem.

We also hope to sell copies to schools and individuals in the U.S. To order by mail, send a check for \$6 (includes postage) to the Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project, P.O. Box 483, Richland Center, WI 53581. Or purchase calendars at our October 18 benefit.

Current Events in Nicaragua

A worldwide glut in coffee has brought prices to their lowest levels in 100 years and devastation to Nicaragua's coffee growing areas. Small-scale growers are facing foreclosure and unemployed coffee pickers are suffering from malnutrition. Starvation deaths have been reported.

President Enrique Bolanos is leading an anti-corruption campaign against Arnaldo Aleman. Bolanos and other members of Aleman's Liberal Party, with the support of the Sandinistas, are moving to indict the former president and his cronies on charges of stealing \$100 million in public funds, remove him as president of the National Assembly, and to strip him of his immunity. More details at the Nica Net web site:

<http://www.nicanet.org/>

New Motor For The Sea Turtle Boat

The sea turtle protection boat, the "Hermandad Wisconsin," has been patrolling the waters of Chacocente to warn shrimp and fishing boats away from the thousands of sea turtles approaching the nesting beach. Not only do fishermen inadvertently catch and kill sea turtles in their nets, but some unscrupulous individuals purposely kill and cut open the turtles to take their eggs.

The patrol boat, bought for Santa Teresa by the Sister City Project in 1999, had been out of commission but was repaired earlier this year. A use and maintenance agreement has been negotiated among concerned organizations.

In late August the boat was launched into heavy seas from the beach at Chacocente for the last patrol of the month. The much-repaired motor stalled and a high wave flipped the boat over against rocks. No one was hurt, but the motor was ruined.

A request to the Sister City board for funds to buy a new motor was turned down since funds were already budgeted for this year's projects. Feeling that it was essential to continue the boat patrol at the height of the turtle nesting season, Peter Smith and Jane Furchgott each put up half the \$1600 cost of a nearly new 40 h.p. Suzuki motor. Peter and Jane will appreciate help with this purchase from anyone able to contribute.

Eighth Annual Burrito Supper on Oct 18

The supper will feature tortillas with a wide variety of fillings, as well as salsas and sauces, rice, and homemade desserts. Price for the supper and the dance to follow is \$8 (children under 12, \$4), with family rates available. The meal or dance alone is \$5 (children, \$3). Volunteers are needed to donate desserts or serve at the meal.