

# SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 22

Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project

September 2004

## CONSTRUCTION TO BEGIN ON LA POMA SCHOOL

By Janet Gee

Now that we have ensured that the villages of Escalante and La Palma/El Papalon have adequate schools with desks, tables and chairs and chalkboards, it is the turn of the fourth village of La Poma to build its new two-room school. The Nicaraguan Ministry of Education has frequently promised to provide one but it has never happened. The old school is falling down, has a dirt floor and no latrines. This year, under the energetic leadership of José and Jennie Marroquin from our Project, a special fund was created to raise the funds for this endeavor. Originally, it was hoped the school would cost about \$4,500. However, with the price of building materials rising everywhere, the final cost with latrines, well and desks etc. will be nearer to \$6,500. We are very happy to report that we have met our goal, thanks to very hard work on the part of St. John's Lutheran, Trinity and Peace United Methodist Churches in Richland Center that brought in matching funds from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, the Sunday School of Christ Lutheran Church in Spring Green and a generous donation by a Richland Center resident and other friends. We expect building to begin when the rains stop in November and hope it will be ready for the start of the school year in February 2005. Following our policy, we will supply the materials and the community will supply the labor. However, there may be a difference this time. Several of our supporters have expressed a wish to visit Chacocente to work on a project. We are going to try to organize a working trip in January to help finish the school. See elsewhere in this newsletter for details.

This year we have continued to support the teachers and their 141 students enrolled in the three schools in our villages. Two times during the school year each student receives a kit containing pencils, pens, crayons, erasers, notebooks, rulers, etc. Most of the families have very little cash so anything we can do to help the children learn is gratefully accepted. We also supply the teachers with the necessary books, shelves and cupboards. In addition, the school in La Palma/El Papalon was enlarged with a second classroom, built by villagers using materials donated by the Sister City Project.

As a further incentive to attend school, we have supported the celebrations for the Nicaraguan National Holidays. This is marked with food, piñatas and games. This event is a highlight in the harsh and difficult lives of these families.



*Sixth graders students from the Chacocente community of La Chota. Very few will be able to continue their education without financial assistance.*

Finally, we are considering starting a new effort to provide scholarships to help students who are eligible to continue their education beyond the six grades available in the village schools. To go on, the students have to travel to Santa Teresa, El Astillero or Jinotepe for further education. This involves the expense of transportation,

registration fees, uniforms, books, food and sometimes accommodation. A yearly scholarship of around \$150 to \$200 would be a big help to such students. We will tell you more about this idea later in the year.

Our steady support for the schools has been greatly appreciated by the village families. They understand that we are offering an opportunity for them to become more self-sufficient. When Derrick and I were there in 2003, one mother was crying because she could not afford for her two daughters to attend high school in Santa Teresa. With your help, we can offer real support and hope to a people who have often been disappointed by broken promises.



*A mother and children from Chacocente pose with the family cow.*

### Help Build a School in Chacocente

Join us for a week in Nicaragua, learn some Spanish, contribute to the school project, make new friends, see a different way of life, have fun! Details are yet to be finalized, but we are planning for January and anticipate the total cost will be around \$1000. At least one fluent Spanish speaker from the SCP board will be in the group. If interested, call Janet or Derrick Gee, 608 588-3942

### Burrito Supper on Oct 15

The annual Sister City Burrito Supper and Dance will be held on Friday, October 15th at Blue Highways, 165 N Central in Richland Center. Serving will begin at 5:30. The dance, with music provided by Kettle Creek, is scheduled for 7:30 pm.

As always, the supper will feature tortillas with a wide variety of fillings, as well as salsas and sauces, rice, and delicious homemade desserts. Price for both the supper and the dance is \$9 (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. If you can help, please contact Jane Furchgott (583-2431) or Mary Bard (647-2594, bard@mwt.net).

All proceeds will benefit the Project's work for the people and environment of Santa Teresa, Nicaragua.

Donations to support the work of the Sister City Project are always gratefully accepted. Contributions may be sent to our treasurer, Amber Raimer, %SCP, PO Box 483, Richland Center, WI 53581

**Contributors:** Nate Bard, Janet and Derrick Gee, Jane Furchgott (articles); Nate, Sarah Otterstrom, Peter Smith, José Marroquin (photos); Charles Munch, Stein Goering (editing).  
**Special thanks to Advanced Technology Solutions, Richland Center, WI 608.647.6350 for printing services.**

## Enthusiasm For Sewing Lessons

The new Women's Sewing Project, which was requested by the local women, has been a big hit. Forty-one Chacocente women of all ages took part.

The Commission chose to center the program on the communities of El Papalon and Escalante. Two new treadle sewing machines were bought for each site. A house in each community was the classroom for lessons in machine and hand sewing.

The teacher, Maria Luisa Monjarez, taught once a week in each village. In the morning she taught theory and learning to cut and tailor, and in the afternoon actual practice on the sewing machines. The students worked with paper before they used cloth. Other sewing supplies, such as scissors and needles, were also provided.

The sewing machines are collectively owned by the communities for the use of all the students. Some women said they intended to use the machines for mending. Others were more ambitious, planning first to make dresses for themselves and then pants.

The students' enthusiasm for learning was so great that Leonidas donated part of the money intended for his office expenses to pay Sra. Monjarez's salary for another four months. The class will end in September with certificates for the graduates. The directivas of El Papalon and Escalante will be in charge of the care, location, and collective use of the sewing machines after the classes are over.

In another new initiative, the SCP has lent \$54 to three women in Escalante, who will use the money to buy cloth to make children's clothes. The clothes will be sold in the communities at a price lower than in the stores.

## Health News Briefs

- We continue to support ten health promoters in the four villages. Our funding pays for continuing training in natural and herbal healing by Estermila Prudente. There is a small stipend for each promoter. For this they are expected to make home visits when necessary, and provide community health education. In addition, they are still producing and selling natural remedies at a low cost in the villages.
- Preparations are underway to construct a small health building for the Escalante promoters. This group, the most energetic among the villages, has previously worked in a plastic lined enclosure within a local home. We hope that better surroundings will help the women develop their programs.
- SCP Representative Leonidas Grijalva was hurt when he lost control of his motorcycle after the front tire blew out. The accident, which occurred last June, happened while Leonidas was transporting his two children to visit relatives. Fortunately, his children were unhurt, but Leonidas suffered lacerations to his cheek, injured ribs and bruises around one eye. We are happy to report that his health is much better, and there appears to be no risk of permanent eye damage.

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## Turtle Crisis, *continued from Page 4*

This is only a short-term approach to the problem. Leonidas, who encourages this letter campaign, says, "The problem is the social situation, Chacocente's poverty. The turtles with their eggs are paying for people's necessities. Here only the Nicaraguan government, in conjunction with environmental organizations, would be able to put an end to this ecological disaster. How? Enabling and giving work to these people, along with other special support."



*Sewing instructor Maria Luisa Monjarez and her students from Escalante (photo by Nate Bard)*

## Chacocente Report - May 2004

by Nate Bard

My trip to the Chacocente area of Nicaragua went very well. It came at the end of a long stay in South America, however, where I learned Spanish in Chile and traveled throughout Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Bolivia. My return ticket allowed for a free added stop over in Costa Rica, so I decided that it would be a prime opportunity not only to see some of Costa Rica, but also to return to Nicaragua after about 10 years. My first trip to Nicaragua was in 1994 with my dad, Neil. We visited Santa Teresa and Chacocente, and stayed with Jose Martinez. My experience was very different this time, since I was 10 years older, traveling alone, and speaking Spanish. Since my last trip, I had always been supportive of the program (mainly through my parents), but I was unaware as to what was going on and to how the projects were organized. Much of my time was spent interviewing the project leads with Leonidas, learning about how projects worked and who is involved. Leonidas was very helpful with my research as I accompanied him along on the back of his motorcycle to each of the communities.

I was finally able to get a hold of Leonidas from San Jose, and we connected in Rivas without a problem. He met me at the bus stop and I rode on the back of his motorcycle, clutching the riding handles while trying to oppose the weight of my backpack that aimed to throw me off the back of the bike. We ate lunch with his cousin, Jorge, and ran some errands in Rivas. We employed the taxi services of Jorge's regular taxi guy ("El conejo" or the rabbit) after realizing the weight of my backpack would have been a very, very rough ride on the motorcycle. El Conejo shuttled me to Playa Guasacaste while Leonidas followed behind.

I stayed in a surfer's hostel at Playa Guasacaste. It is a beautiful beach that draws small numbers of hardcore surfers from around the world. The development in this area is mostly small hostels outfitted with a few rooms, hammocks, and the occasional parrot hanging about. The hostel was about 10 kilometers south of El Astillero, on the shores of a small lake, which was also an estuary. It was cheap (~\$4/night) and practically on the beach, which was nice for a morning swim. The area is very popular with the locals on the weekends, where they come to swim in the lake and walk along the beach.

*Nate spent 2 days traveling around Chacocente with Leonidas, where he met group leaders and local farmers and discussed possibilities of eco-tourism. The above piece is an excerpt from his report; his observations were also used in other articles in this issue.*

## Looking Ahead to 2005

By Derrick Gee

Our planning process for 2005 is moving into gear. We take an "empowerment" approach to selecting priorities. The Chacocente Commission of elected villagers will soon be getting together to thrash out how they would like to use their physical resources and our financing in the next calendar year. Also your Sister City Board in Wisconsin has some decisions to make.

First, there is the strategic question of expanding our services to more villages. For four years, we've focused on four communities that seemed most critically in need. But, there are approximately seventeen villages, similar to these, that have an impact on the delicate Chacocente preserve and that are so remote from local government services that they get little attention. We feel that it's time to grow, and are considering projects in the community of La Chota. However, our original communities are not quite ready to be "weaned" from our support. So, in 2005, we hope to work with at least five villages.

Secondly, the new year will bring a new challenge in funding our local representation. You may recall that we were very fortunate to have Wisconsin farmer, Peter Smith, living in Chacocente for over two years, getting to understand the issues on the ground and helping the communities work with us on solutions. Two years ago, before Peter came home, he helped us find a local representative, Leonidas Grijalva, who has worked tirelessly to maintain the momentum, and ensure that our funds are properly utilized.

The cost of this administration is kept low by avoiding the cost of offices and fancy SUVs that larger organizations seem to find necessary. Leonidas works from home and rides a motorcycle. We have been doubly blessed because Peter has funded the total cost of Leonidas' service out of his own pocket to help us with the transition. That comes to an end as of December 2004. So, for next year, we need to raise the cost of employing Leonidas, as well as the cost of extension to at least one new village, in addition to financing the health, education, agriculture and environmental programs that your generosity permits.

In October, you'll receive our annual "appeal letter" which generates the vast majority of our funds. Please consider helping us grow our vital work with a growth in your contribution.

## Latrines For Two Villages

Most of the Chacocente communities have used the forest as their toilet. Parasitic diseases transmitted through human waste are common.

This year two communities, La Poma and El Papalon, chose to have a latrine construction project. Nate Bard saw the beginning of the project when he visited Chacocente in May: "I went to El Papalon to meet Marcos, the director of the latrines program. He told me that the latrines were going well, and that they had 24 latrines dug and finished. He explained to me that each family builds their own latrine, but the price of materials continues to rise. None of the latrines have roofs because of rising costs, and Marcos wasn't sure how long they would have to wait to get them finished. In La Poma, almost all the latrines are dug; they just need the cement tops put on and the building constructed. They were also missing roofs due to rising costs."

The high cost of building materials, caused partly by the rebuilding of Iraq, means that budgeted amounts did not cover the actual cost of finishing the latrines. The SCP was able to make up the difference, and corrugated metal roofing was delivered to the villages in July.

Once again, we are grateful for the confidence of the Madison Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. Their \$2000 grant helped us roof the latrines, and is also being used in the agricultural and school programs.

## Agricultural Program

After getting off to a promising start in 2003, our 3-year ecological agriculture program is having a difficult year. Forty farmers are involved, getting a choice of desired inputs (seed, fertilizer, tools, or fencing) in exchange for learning and practicing soil conservation and ecological farming methods on their fields.

Our agriculture specialist, Marcial Chavarria, resigned his position in May, citing personal reasons as well as discontentment with some of the producers' unwillingness to complete their commitments. His impression was that some of the farmers thought he, Marcial, should do the work as well as teach it.

Leonidas has hired a new specialist, Carlos Martinez, who has experience with plant pests and diseases, micro-irrigation, gardening, and fruit growing. The fall rains came in time for the second planting cycle, so this year's program has another chance for success.

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## COMING EVENTS CALENDAR

### Horwich to Speak at UW-Richland

SCP consultant Dr Rob Horwich will present a lecture as part of the Love of Learning series at the UW-Richland campus. Rob will focus on his experiences studying primates in Belize in the 1980's which led him to create the first community-based conservation project, the Community Baboon Sanctuary.

Rob has worked for twenty years in primate conservation, education and empowerment of rural communities, helping local people protect their natural resources within their own social, cultural and economic context. In these times of increasing concentration of power, Rob's success with decentralized control is a refreshing and inspirational story.

After the presentation there will be refreshments and time for informal discussion. **Monday, October 4, 7 pm. Pippin Conference Room, UW-Richland.**

### Presentation on Nueva Vida Co-op

"Are Your Clothes Clean?" will feature two members of the Nueva Vida women's sewing co-op. The women will describe their worker-owned fair trade t-shirt factory which has successfully competed against nearby sweatshops. Located in Ciudad Sandino, the co-op was organized by the Center for Development in Central America. Some readers may remember CDCA members Pat and Kathy Floerke, sisters who spoke in RC several years ago. **Tuesday, October 5, 7 pm. St. Paul's University Catholic Center, Newman Hall, 723 State St. (on Library Mall, UW-Madison).**

### "Trading Democracy" Video and Discussion

A program on free trade by Laura Negronida from Gays Mills will feature the video "Trading Democracy". This Bill Moyer documentary describes the negative effects of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) on farmers and business in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada.

Laura will also be discussing upcoming free trade congressional votes, including CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) which may come up during the lame duck session later this year. In addition, the "fast track" provisions of NAFTA are scheduled for renewal on

March 1, 2005. **Monday, Nov 8, 7 pm. Brewer  
Library, 325 N Central, Richland Center.**



Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project  
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## 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BURRITO SUPPER AND DANCE

Friday, Oct 15

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

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

Tortillas, fillings, salsas, rice, desserts

Music by the Kettle Creek Band  
square & contra dance

Suggested Donation: \$9.00 Adults,  
\$4.00 Children under 12

All proceeds support our work in Santa Teresa

Change Service Requested

## Sea Turtles in Crisis

by Jane Furchgott

After visiting Nicaragua with our January, 2004 delegation, I had hopes that the protection of sea turtles would improve at Chacocente. Santa Teresa's Mayor Cortes had promised us that the cost of the turtle protection boat patrols would be paid for by a large non-governmental organization. In addition, the head of MARENA at Chacocente, Jorge Carcache, assured us that there would be a police presence in El Astillero, where fishermen bring the eggs cut from female turtles killed at sea. Neither promise has been kept.

To make matters worse, the recent improvements to the road to the Chacocente MARENA station included a bridge over the Escalante River. This facilitates illegal trafficking of turtle eggs straight from the nesting beach.

For months now Leonidas has been continually frustrated in his attempts to negotiate the SCP's yearly agreement with MARENA and Mayor Cortes to finance the boat patrols as they originally promised. No money has been forthcoming from the Mayor's office and very little from MARENA.

For the last five years, the SCP has been exchanging information with Sarah Otterstrom, a research ecologist now living in California, who has been continually involved in protecting Chacocente's forest and wildlife. During a visit in August, she noted the lack of turtle protection and learned from an El Astillero fisherman that there were twelve boats involved in killing turtles.



A boy collecting turtle eggs. Some egg harvesting is permitted under a quota system, but most of the trafficking is illegal. (Sarah Otterstrom photo)

Since October is the peak of olive ridley nesting, Sarah had the idea of an international letter campaign encouraging the Nicaraguan government to seriously address the problem. Last year a similar campaign stopped Atlantic coast Nicaraguans from catching bottle-nosed dolphins and selling them to U.S. swim-with-the-dolphins parks.

Sarah and I have worked with Todd Steiner of the Sea Turtle Restoration Project (STRP) on a letter. Members of the extensive STRP turtle action network and other organizations are being encouraged to write letters to the Nicaraguan president. If you are concerned about the turtle situation, please write to President Bolaños. (See sample letter below.)

*(Article Continued on Page 2, inside)*

Presidente Enrique Bolaños  
Casa Presidencial  
Costado Norte de la Antigua Catedral  
Managua, Nicaragua Central America  
Tel: 011-505-228-9090 Fax: 011-505-228-9298  
Presidente@presidencia.gob.ni

Dear President Bolaños,

Nicaragua's international environmental reputation may be severely damaged if the current high level of sea turtle poaching at sea and at nesting beaches is not immediately curtailed.

Sea turtles are listed as endangered species by the World Conservation Union, and under several international treaties to which Nicaragua is a party, including the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the Inter-American Sea Turtle Treaty. When nations fail to restrict citizen activities that undermine the effectiveness of such treaties, punitive trade restrictions may result. This is something we believe all parties wish to avoid.

Currently, it is public knowledge that fishermen at sea are catching and killing hundreds of pregnant female sea turtles to extract their eggs, which are then being openly sold throughout Nicaragua. Additionally, poaching of eggs at beach nesting sites is rampant and uncontrolled. These activities, which are in violation of Nicaraguan law, are occurring along the Pacific coast, and in particular near to the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge.

We believe this situation could be easily curtailed by increasing police presence within the coastal towns of El Astillero and Veracruz de Acayo, known illegal egg trade centers, and along the coastal highway corridor.

We hope you will take immediate action to protect this critically endangered international resource.

Sincerely yours,

To transmit this sample letter by email, go to  
[www.seaturtles.org](http://www.seaturtles.org) and click on Action Alerts

