

SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 32

Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project

October 2009

Chacocente Close-up

Jane Furchgott interviews SCP vice-president José Marroquin about his August trip to Santa Teresa. A native of El Salvador, José came to Wisconsin in 1984 after fleeing death squad threats for his union activities.

Jane: You have been active in the Sister City Project (SCP) for many years. What inspires your work?

José: I like to make other people happy or ease their suffering a little bit. It is very hard to be poor in a third world country like Nicaragua, where there is no chance to come out of poverty or get other opportunities without leaving your home and family. When somebody comes to me and says "thank you for helping us," that makes me proud of what we do, and that is what inspires me to continue working for them.

Jane: You spent most of your recent visit in the Chacocente communities.

José: Yes, I like to visit the communities where we work, and spend time with those people who are being helped by the SCP. I think they feel comfortable talking to me, since we speak the same language and have similar customs. We have to remember that I came from a country like theirs, and we share the same problems, worries and hopes.

Jane: What are the people's concerns?



Jackson Campos

A Chacocente woman receives her new water filter. The filters are really improving the villagers' health!



Alma Susana Chávez

Jose Marroquin with a pelibuey lamb in the village of Escalante. These woolless sheep are raised for meat.

José: Their main concerns are: the lack of opportunities for everybody, bad planting seasons, too many kids to feed, and worries about the SCP leaving them.

Jane: Are the SCP-funded programs appreciated? What changes do you see in people's lives there?

José: All the programs that the SCP carries out are the projects that the people want. They really appreciate what we do for them, since we work from the bottom up and not the other way around. I can see so many changes in the people from those communities -- they have more hope for the future, they are improving their health problems or the way they live, they are more organized than before.

Jane: We have focused on providing access to water, especially clean water. How are our water projects going, and what more is needed?

José: In most communities the water projects are going well, in other communities the people are too laid back and postpone some projects, but those projects will be done somehow in time. I love to see the wells that the SCP financed and how the people have new ways of getting clean water. What I really would like to see are more water filters and more education on the need to drink more water than Chacocente people drink right now.

— Continued on page 2



Janet Gee

A Chacocente man hulls rice, a Nicaraguan staple. José Marroquin reports that this season's rice crop failed due to drought, although the bean crop was good. Farmers are waiting for rain for their second planting.

Chacocente Close-up, continued

Jane: Dr. Quintanilla had to leave his Santa Teresa post earlier this year. How is our Chacocente health program continuing with the new doctor?

José: The Chacocente health program is going like when Doctor Quintanilla was there, or better. The new doctor is very young and does not have much experience in medicine, but the nurse (Meybol) has a lot of experience in health care, and that helps a lot. Right now they are training 20 health promoters in first aid, giving shots, delivering babies, and minor surgeries.

Jane: What did you see when you visited the village schools? Is the school lunch program successful?

José: The school lunch program is working well, the kids like it. Many people told me that they were thankful for this program, they hope that it will continue. The only problem that the schools have are teachers who don't spend enough time in the community.

Jane: You have known Iván Dinarte, the new Santa Teresa mayor, for over 10 years. Is he happy with our collaboration?

José: Iván is very thankful for our support for those communities that are in the rural area. He told me that he is happy to work with us and that he will try to be more efficient in sending us the documents that we require. Iván is promoting the work of the SCP at the municipal level. I like Iván better than the other mayors before him.

Jane: You first met Alma Susana Chávez in 2007 when she had just begun her job as SCP facilitator. What is your impression of her work now?

José: Well, when I met Alma Susana for the first time, I thought that she was young and over-emotional. But this time I visited Chacocente, the Alma Susana that I met was a different person; more mature, more outgoing, more happy and more knowledgeable in what she does and thinks. Everybody in the communities loves her, and in the Alcaldia, too. In my personal opinion, we are lucky to have her working for us.

Jane: Has this recent trip given you any new thoughts about the sister city relationship?

José: Yes, this recent trip has given me more energy to continue working with the SCP, and gave me some new ideas on making single projects into communal projects, like a well that will deliver water to several families and not to only one. I think that we have to change the way that we have been working and make some improvements in our relationship with the people in the communities. Also I believe that we have to make better projects (even if we spend a little more money) on things that will last for a long time and not like the latrines that look like a strong wind will take them down. I think there is a lot of opportunity for us to improve in what we think and do. ✨



Jane Furchgott

A light moment at the Escalante meeting to elect Sister City representatives

Making New Connections

by Janet Gee

It's October and the Sister City Board is beginning to look back over the work in 2009 and forward to plans for next year as we try to address the many needs that still exist in the Chacocente area of the Santa Teresa municipality.

The monthly reports received from Alma Susana, our Nicaraguan facilitator, are full of numbers of wells and latrines built, water filters and school supplies donated, environmental and agricultural education provided for children and adults, endangered sea turtle and dry forest protection projects.

In addition to our donor-supported work in 2009, SCP has continued to partner with other groups and individuals with similar interests. Last year, the Madison-based Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua (WCCN) "adopted" a village through SCP. As a result La Solera received twelve latrines, fourteen well lids and four wells.



Janet Gee

Intern Brian David visiting with Maria Justina in La Chota

This year, our first intern, Brian David, from California, financed his own six-month stay in Nicaragua. Living in Santa Teresa and Chacocente, he visited the communities with Alma and Jackson, learning about the issues we face and producing a report on how we might best improve the educational programs in Chacocente (see Elizabeth Pflug-Froh's article on page 4).

In another first this year, we partnered with the Friends of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve in La Farge, Wisconsin, to put on an environmental fundraising event. Both organizations benefited from this, but in addition, both groups learned more about the other's work to save the



Janet Gee

A boy from the Santa Teresa community of La Solera

fragile ecosystems of our world. We plan to continue this partnership next year.

For several years, we have been the grateful recipients of generous donations from the Madison, Wisconsin chapter of the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. Now we are taking steps towards having our own Peace Corps volunteer who would spend two years in Chacocente, working with Alma and the local Ministry of Education people.

Finally, to conclude this list of "firsts", we were very excited when a teacher in a private Quaker school in North Carolina contacted us through the Web. A Spanish teacher, familiar with travel in Central America, Robert LaVelle takes a group of his older students to do a project abroad each year. It seems likely that next year they will go to Chacocente. He has already visited with Alma and discussed several possible projects..

Once again, on behalf of those who receive direct and much needed help in Santa Teresa, we thank you for all that you do to make these projects possible. We who work in the U.S. are not paid and pay our own expenses when we travel to Nicaragua. We are very encouraged by the widening circle of people who believe in what we do and who want to contribute in any way they can. ✨

A QUICK HISTORY...

In 1997 the Santa Teresa mayor asked the SCP's help for the sea turtles and the poor communities in Chacocente Wildlife Refuge. This Nicaraguan national reserve, mostly in the southern part of the Santa Teresa municipality, borders the Pacific Ocean. Since then, our projects have focused on Chacocente's villages, turtle beaches and tropical dry forest. We are starting to work with communities in the Refuge's buffer zone as well.



Tom Stadler

These serious La Chota preschool students sit at a table with supplies given by the SCP.

Focus on Education

by Elizabeth Pflug-Froh

In 2008-9 SCP volunteer intern Brian David spent several months in Santa Teresa observing and writing a report on the state of education in the schools in our sponsored villages. With this first-hand information we hope to be able to promote and improve the education that the Chacocente children receive.

Some of Brian's concerns and recommendations follow:

PROBLEMS

Transportation:

- Most Chacocente teachers live in the city of Santa Teresa, and ride the infrequent rural buses to their schools, often arriving at noon on Monday and leaving mid-morning on Friday, losing 6 hours a week of teaching time.

School Materials:

- The Ministry of Education often doesn't provide the most basic school materials for the school children and the teachers. The villages have to rely on outside sponsors to build and repair their schools and provide them with school supplies.

Poor Attendance:

- There is low enrollment in many villages due to parental misconceptions about the role of education.
- Some farming families relying on child labor tend to keep their children home.
- Many children walk long distances to school, and during the rainy season cannot cross rivers to get to school.
- The quality of teachers, paucity of school materials, and short school hours frustrate many parents who then

refuse to send their children to school, feeling it is a waste of time.

Low Quality of Education:

- Teaching and tests are not standardized. Teachers make up their own curriculum and tests.
- Low quality teachers are often assigned to the rural areas. Qualified teachers rarely request a rural post.
- Educational materials are lacking. Children have to share books in class and are not allowed to take books home.
- One teacher has to teach all subjects to several grades, severely limiting the time for each subject and class, especially as the school day is only 4 hours long.

Secondary School:

- Chacocente children rarely attend high school, due to the extreme distances the students must travel, the cost of room and board to go to high school in Santa Teresa, and the lack of parental support for higher education.
- The Saturday secondary classes in La Chota are of poor quality. The new Chacocente area secondary school at La Pitilla is still a 1 to 3 hour walk from most of our sponsored villages.



Jane Furchgott

"Today Education is Our Right – Let's Go to Class!"
— a poster in the La Chota school

Everyone is welcome to come to our meetings and join our discussions. SCP meetings are held once a month in the Pippin rooms at the Richland Hospital. Call Janet Gee at 608 588-3942 for meeting dates, or information about the SCP.

BRIAN'S RECOMMENDATIONS

- Hire drivers to take teachers to and from Chacocente schools on time.
- Provide monetary incentives for better qualified teachers to apply for rural positions.
- Change the school year to avoid the rainy season.
- Assist teachers with teaching materials and students with school supplies.
- Provide a teacher's aide to help the teacher.
- Encourage teacher continuing education.
- Provide incentives and awards to students for attendance and achievement.
- Support the new secondary school in La Pitilla. Provide scholarships for interested students to attend the Santa Teresa high school.
- Develop standardized tests.
- Start school gardens to provide healthy lunches for the children.
- Provide adult education classes to improve adult literacy and promote parental support for their child's education.

This summer, Brian visited Wisconsin to attend the SCP Board's special meeting on education. We discussed many possibilities for improving education in Chacocente. The SCP is already providing supplies for students and teachers in five schools, also funding some incentives and prizes for the best students. We had been focusing on expanding opportunities for secondary education, but at this meeting we decided that improving the existing primary education should be our first goal.

The success of Brian's internship led us to the idea that we might follow with another intern who could act



Alma Susana Chávez

Sixth grade graduation exercises at the La Poma school.

as an aide/trainer for the Chacocente teachers, facilitate improvement in education and help with transportation and supplies. We are now seeking a Peace Corps volunteer for this intern position in 2010.

There are grave needs in the Chacocente village schools. We are seeking the most efficient, economic and successful means of improving education for the rural children. Our hope is that with our effort and that of the Santa Teresa community we will be able to raise the next generation out of poverty through education and better paying jobs. ✪



Tom Stadler

A boy at the El Terrero school receives a book donated by the SCP. Recently, the teacher at this school became very sick. The strapped Nicaraguan government had put a freeze on substitute teachers. SCP decided to pay a substitute so the kids can finish the school year in November.

Jubilee House Speakers

by Elizabeth Pflug-Froh

Pat and Kathy Floerke of Jubilee House Community will speak again in Richland Center on Tuesday, October 13 at 7:00 pm at the Pippin Center, Melvill Hall, UW Richland. Their talk is called "Sharing Hardship, Sharing Hope." They will also be selling Nicaraguan crafts, including pottery and jewelry.

These sisters work with the Center for Development in Central America, in Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua, which has organized people in a very poor area to work together for their basic rights, health care, and starting cooperative businesses. ✪

Our SCP website is santa-teresa.wccnica.org — check it out and see the newsletter photos in full color. All newsletters from the past couple of years are available online, along with announcements of upcoming events.

What Is Sustainability?

by Derrick Gee, SCP President

This buzzword of today could be defined as “the method of using a resource so so that it is not depleted.” We are all familiar with the popular contexts--the sustainable use of water, soil, trees and energy.

In addition, there are other aspects of life that call for a sustainable approach. How can we make our relationship with a fellow human a sustainable, life-long affair? How can we sustain our relationship with an employer? Our small, or not-so-small, business can only be sustainable if it is profitable.

For SCP there is yet another context; and it exercises our minds regularly as we decide how best to utilize your generous donations to help the people of Santa Teresa. How sustainable are the improvements that we try to bring about? The iconic Peter Smith who lived in our villages for over two years would ask our Nica friends “What will you do when the Gringo’s gone?” that is, “When SCP has partnered with you to establish more sustainable food production and better health and education, how will you sustain those improvements?”

We’re still searching for the answers. In the case of our agricultural program, we provide training and basic farm supplies for three years, then move on to other farmers. A majority, but not all, then continue to implement the new techniques. When a family works with us to install a well, it provides clean water with a minimum of maintenance far into the future. The bee project is sustainable in that it doesn’t deplete the floral resource and because once we have taught the techniques, it can be expanded by the beekeepers dividing the swarms and building more hives from renewable resources.

It is a different story with education and health care. We provide school supplies and improved hot lunches to all students because neither their families nor the government have the resources to do so. But once these students graduate, there are more young folks coming into the system with these same needs. We train young people to provide basic medical care in their village, and some of this becomes part of the communal store of knowledge and thus sustainable. But the monthly visit by our doctor to each village and the supply of medications dry up as soon as we stop supplying it. This part of our program is not sustainable, in the sense that if we go away, so does the medical service.

Of course, we could say that education and health care are basic human rights that the government should supply. But we’re not very good at that here in the United States even when our government’s tax income is many,



Alma Susana Chávez and Derrick Gee stand in front of a poster for the “I don’t eat turtle eggs” campaign. SCP is collaborating with FFI (Fauna & Flora International) and other organizations on this Nicaraguan countrywide environmental education effort.

many times greater than that in Nicaragua; and we do see some signs of small improvements in the Nicaraguan government’s assistance to the most poor. In the meantime, we will work hard on your behalf to support sustainable food production and clean water supplies without depleting the area’s natural resources.

Having brought together the people of Santa Teresa and our donors for over twenty years, we can all safely claim to be part of a sustainable family. ✨

“The check’s in the mail”

For most of us, these are still tough times, financially. It’s been the same for many charitable organizations, especially the bigger ones. SCP is very small. We have no payroll to meet in the USA and no shrinking endowment fund. But, we do depend heavily on you, our donors, to keep helping the poorest of the poor pull themselves up by their bootstraps. In November our one and only annual appeal letter will be “in the mail.” Please send as much as you can afford. Every tax-deductible dollar goes a long way in Nicaragua.

P.S. You don’t have to wait for the letter before donating. Make checks to Santa Teresa SCP and mail to Treasurer Stein Goering, c/o SCP, PO Box 483, Richland Center, WI 53581.

Thank you. — Derrick Gee

Our Environmental Projects

by Alma Susana Chávez, SCP Nicaraguan facilitator

Environmental Education

This year I gave environmental workshops in five Chacocente Wildlife Refuge community schools. We talked about the sea turtles, their lives at sea, how they reproduce, their current situation, and how to protect them. The program also included themes of taking care of our environment and the natural resources of our schools and communities.



Orange-chinned Parakeets, like many birds in Chacocente, are exotic species to us. But such familiar migratory birds as Baltimore Orioles, Scarlet Tanagers, and Yellow Warblers winter there.

I use techniques of animation, presentation, and recreation to involve the children. The workshops are aimed at the children, but on the day of the program the parents also come and listen.

The theme we are presenting is reforestation and improving our environment. The final outcome will be a little tree nursery in each school. The nurseries have been put on hold for now because there has been a drought due to the El Niño phenomenon, and they would be a failure without rain.

Sometimes I teach alone, on other occasions with university students or with FFI's environmental educator. I don't do workshops with Jeffers (Jeffers Cruz, the MARENA director of Chacocente Wildlife Refuge) but we (SCP) provide him with materials for similar activities.

Guarding the Refuge

Jeffers is also in charge of materials for patrolling the refuge. We provide him with flashlights, batteries, and

water containers. We have supplied paint for large banners about turtle protection at the Refuge entrance and in El Astillero, the nearby fishing town.

This season there are no community members working at the turtle arribada beach, despite the fact that only four MARENA (Nicaragua's DNR) guards are protecting thousands of olive ridley sea turtle nests. Jeffers just told me that MARENA will hire two more guards. The situation is a little worse than last year, because we no longer have the economic aid from FFI. Their five-year project is now finished. Jeffers is making a good effort to protect the turtles using minimal resources.

'I Don't Eat Turtle Eggs' Campaign

We had activities in Santa Teresa's central park, with loudspeakers, music, and information handed to passers-by. We helped the Santa Teresa high school students make a parade float about sea turtle protection.

The most important activities were the visits to the primary and secondary schools in the cities of Santa Teresa, Jinotepe., and Diriamba, where we presented the video "The Turtles Also Weep." We also visited the markets of these cities to check whether turtle eggs were being illegally sold, but we didn't find any. We distributed turtle egg campaign posters and decals. ♣

José Gabriel Fonseca Martínez



José Gabriel Fonseca Martínez

During the arribada season, Nicaraguan army soldiers are stationed at the Chacocente nesting beach to help guard the nesting turtles and their eggs.

Newsletter Production: Jane Furchgott and Sue Furchgott, with help from Charles Munch

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BURRITO SUPPER & DANCE

You are invited to our 15th annual benefit Burrito Supper & Dance on Friday evening, October 23rd. It will take place at Blue Highways, 165 N. Central, Richland Center.

The 5:30 Burrito Supper will feature build-your-own burritos with all the fixings, salsas, carnitas, beans, rice and homemade cakes and pies...all you can eat.

Starting at 7:30, the Kettle Creek String Band from Gays Mills will play and call old-time dance music, including squares, reels, polkas, and waltzes. Dances will be taught and all ages are welcome.

A suggested donation of \$10 per adult or \$5 per child includes both dinner and dance. If you would like to help or have questions, call Jane Furchgott at 583-2431 or Mary Bard at 647-2594.

Money raised at this event will go to benefit the rural villagers and the sea turtles of Santa Teresa, Nicaragua. ✪



Janet Gee

One of the many wells funded by the SCP, this one lacks a cover and pump. Perhaps you would like to contribute \$40 for a concrete well cover, \$110 for a rope pump, \$200 for materials for a community-dug well, or \$25 for a clay water filter.

Donations to support the work of the Sister City Project are gratefully accepted. Checks payable to "Santa Teresa SCP" may be sent to our treasurer Stein Goering, c/o SCP, PO Box 483, Richland Center, WI 53581. (SCP is a 501c3 non-profit so your donation is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law).