

SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 36

Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project

Fall 2011

Chacocente School Gardens

by Jane Furchgott

Chacocente kids are growing vegetables in their school yard and eating them for lunch.

For several years, we have discussed a school garden project with the Chacocente community members. They liked the idea. This year, it is happening. All five community grade schools sponsored by the Sister City Project – El Papalon, La Poma, Escalante, La Chota, and El Terrero – now have vegetable gardens tended by the children. Forest and fruit trees, such as mango and tangerine, have also been planted for future food and shade.

Everth Torrez, SCP (Sister City Project) agricultural agent, is in charge of the garden program. After meeting with teachers and parents, he designed a detailed plan for each garden site and has given technical training on garden set-up and management.

Beginning in April, Everth put up poster displays in each school, entitled “Creating Our School Gardens.” Garden areas and compost sites were marked out in the school yards. In May, the first compost was ready and seeds were planted, different crops chosen by each school according to its soil type. By June, the gardens were well established, with tomato, pepper, squash, cucumber, and watermelon plants. By the end of June, the La Poma children were already harvesting pipian (a summer squash) and the Escalante children bell peppers.

SCP facilitator, Alma Susana Chávez, reports that the gardens are of great interest to all the children, who have enthusiastically participated in their planting and care. The teachers and some of the parents, many of whom are good gardeners, have helped with the project.



Alma Susana Chávez

Above: Holding a tray of bell pepper seedlings. Below: A proud student gardener shows an ayote squash.



Everth taught the children to make two kinds of organic fertilizer: a quick-maturing compost and a longer-developing fertilizer based on chicken manure and rice hulls. Neem tree leaves were placed in the planting furrows to control insect pests.

The harvested vegetables are eaten by the children as part of their lunches. The school lunch program, with basic nutrition provided by the Nicaraguan socialist government, is augmented with an allowance from the SCP, and now with fresh organic vegetables grown by the students themselves. 🌱

The SCP Backstory...

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.

Secondary School Scholarships

by Janet Gee

For the past ten years the Sister City Project has supported five grade schools in Santa Teresa's Chacocente communities. To encourage regular school attendance we have provided every student with school supplies and supplemented the basic government lunch program. Unfortunately, after sixth grade there is nothing in the communities for the able students who would like to continue on to the secondary level. To reach the nearest full-time school some students have to walk for an hour or two (sometimes on extremely muddy paths) to catch a bus which costs more than their families can afford.

This year we have initiated a scholarship program to help students who have graduated from sixth grade and want to continue their studies. In doing this we hope that not only will the student have a better life but also the whole family will benefit by having a member earning a higher wage. To receive the SCP's \$320 scholarship, the students promise to attend school regularly, keeping their GPA at 80% or higher during each semester. They also agree to do community work, such as tutoring, school clean-up, or helping with the new school gardens.

In this school year, which began in February and goes to the end of November, three students have won scholarships: Marilí Socorro Bravo Chávez, 16, La Chota; Walter José Jiménez Traña, 17, El Terrero; and Noyling Junnieth Reyes Umaña, 12, La Poma. All come from poor farming families, have shown the tenacity to keep studying under very difficult circumstances, and are very grateful for the help and encouragement these scholarships provide.

The SCP Board has been discussing how to ensure that the help given in Chacocente becomes more self-sustaining. We recognize that the basic problem is lack of jobs and education. With your help we hope to continue supporting these young people and others in similar circumstances. The scholarships are gifts which will better enable the young people to give back to and strengthen their families and communities. 🌱

Donations to support the work of the Sister City Project are always gratefully accepted. They may be sent to our treasurer Stein Goering, c/o SCP, PO Box 483, Richland Center, WI 53581.



Alma Susana Chávez

The three 2011 scholarship students: Marili Bravo, Walter Jimenez, and Noyling Reyes

Our SCP website is santa-teresa.wccnica.org — Check it out and see our newsletters with photos in full color, along with announcements of upcoming events. If you want to receive the electronic Sister City Update, please email us at santa-teresa@wccnica.org to let us know.

Visit us on Facebook!
(Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project)



Jane Furchgott

Marili Bravo with her father, Mario, in the La Chota school. Marili writes us "I'm so thankful for the scholarship that you are giving me. I use it to pay for transportation to the La Conquista secondary school, also to buy notebooks, school uniforms, and other requirements." Marili notes that she has been helping weed and water the La Chota school garden, with her father pitching in as well.

Our New Strategic Plan

Linda Stadler, SCP president

The Sister City Project board focused on creating a new strategic plan at our retreat in June. This plan helps guide our work by selecting and prioritizing what we will work on during the next five years, within the context of our ongoing mission: *“To promote friendship and mutual understanding between residents of the Richland Center area and Santa Teresa, Nicaragua through continuous dialogue, exchange and education. To work in partnership to foster sustainable development, especially in the areas of health, education, economic empowerment and the environment.”*



Derrick Gee

A Chacocente homestead

You may wonder why we need a strategic plan for a small organization like the SCP. It is almost more important for us as a volunteer board with limited resources to have such a plan than it is for large organizations. We may all have projects that are of special interest, but this plan helps us organize our work for the future. The strategic plan does not limit our ability to work on any project, but serves as a guide and a timeline.

The previous five year strategic plan was for 2007 – 2011 and the priorities selected were growth, program priorities, organizational structure, human resources, and financial resources. We have been successful in keeping our commitment to these areas and have made improvements throughout the five years.

This year, after a lively brainstorming session, we came up with 15 potential areas to work on. These 15 were narrowed down to the following: expanding our work into new communities in Santa Teresa, maintaining human resources (staff, government, friendly connections) in Santa Teresa, improving education in Santa Teresa, and working on economic and agricultural sustainability. Our next step will be to create a timeline for working on these priorities.



Jane Furchgott

Using a Sister City Project well and pump, El Papalon

Our basic projects of installing latrines, accessing clean water, supporting primary school education, agriculture and the environment have been the foundation of our work in the villages of Santa Teresa. We have increased the number of villages that we work in and plan to continue this expansion. We have maintained stable human resources in Santa Teresa and are able to deepen our relationship through regular visits by board members to Nicaragua. Our focus on education is expanding to include secondary education (high school). Economic and agricultural sustainability is a constant struggle for people in these impoverished areas, and we hope to help them achieve more self-reliance over the next five years. 🌱



Derrick Gee

Oxcart rider, El Terrero

Chacocente Gets Glasses

by Derrick Gee

Eyesight issues are a special focus for Lions Clubs around the world. In 2000, the Spring Green, Wisconsin Lions Club formed a “twinning” relationship with a Lions club in Rivas, Nicaragua, an hour from Santa Teresa. The two clubs were soon at work building an eye clinic in Rivas where volunteer optometrists now provide eye care to the high percentage of Rivas people who cannot afford private care.

For some time now, the Sister City Project and the Rivas Lions have been looking for a way to provide eye care service for the people in the remote Santa Teresa villages, two hours (three in the rainy season) from Rivas. Logistical challenges have stymied efforts in spite of financial encouragement from the Lions of La Farge, Wisconsin. Now, the Rivas club has built a “mobile eye clinic.” All the necessary equipment for basic eye exams can be carried in a pickup truck.

special eye problems were identified from the exam and referred to the Rivas clinic for further treatment.

Of course, there are some community members who can't read. One man, having received his glasses pointed out that now, when he drops a nail, he'll be able to find it again! A lady, on being fitted with glasses, realized that she'll again be able to thread a needle.

Our thanks go out to everyone involved, including the Lions of Spring Green and La Farge who directly supported this project, and also to Richland Center Lions for their contribution to the SCP and to the Lions of Dodgeville, Wisconsin, who helped fund the Rivas eye clinic ten years ago. 🌿

SCP board member Derrick Gee catalyzed the twinning of the Spring Green and Rivas Lions Clubs. After serving as SCP president for four years, he is now the Spring Green Lions Club president.



Tom Stadler

Nimia Umaña from El Terrero enjoys looking at Linda Stadler's photos. Glasses were rare in Chacocente before the Lions Club held their clinic.

On May 7 of this year, a convoy of mobile clinic, two optometrists, and six supporting Lions Club members made the tortuous journey along dirt roads to an agreed point on the edge of the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge. Our SCP coordinator, Alma Susana Chávez, and the health promoters from each village arranged for 105 people with sight issues to visit the clinic. They came on foot and on horseback and received free eye exams and glasses of the appropriate prescription. Five people with

Spring Fling a Success

by Aaron Wunnicke

The annual SCP Spring Fling Benefit was held in April at the Kickapoo Reserve Center near La Farge, WI. Activities included a bird and plant walk, Chacocente slide presentation, live music, and a raptor exhibit with live birds! Local grassfed beef burgers and brats, courtesy of Jack and Margaret Lee, were served up along with many salads and desserts.

The event, which splits proceeds between the Sister City Project and the Friends of the Reserve, has been well attended each of the last three years. This year's event netted over \$2,200 for each organization.

Thanks to those who donated their time, brought food, and/or provided items for the silent auction. The raffle proved to be worthwhile thanks to the generously discounted or donated prizes. First prize was a kayak from Carl's Paddlin' in Lone Rock, second was a fly rod from Cabela's, and third was a pair of birding binoculars from Eagle Optics in Middleton.

Final thanks to all those who attended, please come again and bring a friend. If you haven't yet made the trip consider joining us next year! 🌿

Everyone is welcome at our monthly SCP meetings. Call Janet Gee at 608 588-3942 for meeting dates or information about the SCP.

Alma's Environmental Work

by Jane Furchgott

Santa Teresa's Chacocente Wildlife Refuge is of global importance because it contains one of the world's eight remaining beaches for olive ridley sea turtle arribadas (mass nestings). The Sister City project is lucky to have found Alma Susana Chávez for our facilitator. This young Santa Teresa woman, who recently earned her master's degree in environmental studies, is passionate about sea turtle conservation.

When I visited Chacocente in February, Alma and I met with Jeffer Cruz, the Refuge director for MARENA, the Nicaraguan DNR. Jeffer asked our help stimulating more official interest in the sea turtle beach and making closer connections with Santa Teresa's mayor and other government officials. Alma and I relayed the message to Nicaraguan diputado (congressman) José Martínez, who came through with gasoline for Chacocente road repairs.



Alma Susana Chávez

Refuge director Jeffer Cruz receives batteries supplied by the SCP.

Alma arranged, and the SCP funded the materials for a Chacocente beach clean-up day, getting added support from the Santa Teresa mayor's office. Santa Teresa secondary school students from the local conservation group *Guardabarranco* cleaned up over two miles of Chacocente's turtle nesting beach.

Alma Susana, Jeffer Cruz, and Escalante beach guard Ariel Arteaga have continued to present environmental programs in the Chacocente schools, stressing the importance of natural resource conservation and, above all, preserving Nicaragua's sea turtles. Alma has been



Janet Gee

Alma Susana Chávez volunteers as the treasurer of the Nicaraguan Sea Turtle Network, as well as being active in the "I don't eat turtle eggs" campaign.

making plans for the local schoolchildren to visit the Chacocente MARENA station and see the sea turtles later this year.

At an official meeting in April, the work of the SCP was recognized by the Chacocente authorities, Santa Teresa mayor Ivan Dinarte, and Nicaragua's Minister of the Environment, Juana Argeñal.

The Chacocente arribada season has begun, with 4,000 olive ridley turtles coming in to nest in August. The SCP is again funding supplies for the Chacocente guards, such as flashlights, backpacks, and rubber boots. This year, unfortunately, there is less outside funding for sea turtle monitoring and protection at Chacocente. The SCP will continue its support for the leatherback turtle hatchery, a small but important outpost in the fight to preserve this critically endangered sea turtle. 🌿



Victor Medina - FFI

Olive ridley sea turtle hatchlings

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

Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project

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BURRITO SUPPER & DANCE

You are invited to our 17th annual benefit Burrito Supper & Dance on Friday evening, October 21st. It will take place at Blue Highways, 165 N. Central, Richland Center.

The 5:30 Burrito Supper will feature tortillas with all the fixings, salsas, carnitas, beans, rice and homemade desserts.

At 7:00 the Silent Auction, 7:15 Santa Teresa slide show.

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.

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.



Jane Furchgott

Thank you to the children from Richland Center's Jefferson School, who raised money for a well for this girl's family in the village of Escalante. The well has been completed and the family is drinking clean water. The SCP will be beginning work at least one new village in 2012. Would you like to help bring clean water to another family? A donation of \$320 will pay for a well, cover, and pump.