

SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 40

Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project

October 2013



Alma Susana Chávez

A girl makes green paint handprints as her pledge to care for the sea turtles.

The Children's Visit

By Jane Furchgott

I have been saving this space to report on the "Children's Visit to the Sea Turtles," for which we received a grant from the Raechel and Jackie Foundation. The event was conceived by Sister City Project (SCP) Nicaragua coordinator Alma Susana Chávez for all the Chacocente primary school children, many of whom had never even seen the ocean. The field trip was set to happen last week, but on the previous evening, a bolt of lightning struck and killed Odel Trãna, an 18-year-old Chacocente community ranger patrolling the turtle beach. Out of respect for Odel and his family, the Children's Visit was postponed.

The visit was rescheduled for September 25, a day when an *arribada* (mass olive ridley sea turtle nesting) was expected. Unfortunately, this turned out to be a day early, since the *arribada* did not begin until the next day. I just received this email from Alma, along with her photos:

"We made the Visit of the Children, and it went according to our plans. All the children were happy with the events. We arrived at the Chacocente MARENA (Nicaragua's DNR) station with

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Families Receive Silos

by Maggie May

Subsistence farmers in the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge have traditionally stored their basic grain crops in sacks stacked on the floors of their houses. These sacks are vulnerable to invasion by rodents and chickens, causing many farmers to lose portions of their harvested grains. Metal silos provide pest-resistant, safe storage alternatives for grains. Farmers participating in our Farmer-to-Farmer agricultural training program last year requested assistance in purchasing small silos for the storage of dry grains such as corn, beans, rice, and sorghum.

Recipient farmers pay half of the approximately fifty dollar cost of the silos while the Sister City Project pays for the other half with the help of a generous \$1200 grant from the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Madison. The silos come in two sizes. The larger ones hold 1000 kg (slightly more than one ton) while the smaller ones hold 800 kg (slightly less than a ton). In total, 74 silos are being distributed in the region.

We are pleased to announce that many families in the Chacocente region have recently received their silos, which are locally crafted by a pair of artisans from the

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Alma Susana Chávez

Two El Terrero farmers by the newly-made storage silos. These silos will be a safeguard for food and seed security.

Silos, continued

community of El Calishuate, a village in the Santa Teresa municipality.

In time for the the growing season's first harvest, silos have been delivered to 15 families in the village of El Terrero, 18 families in Escalante, 11 families in El Papalón, 23 families in La Chota, and seven families in La Poma. Upon receiving the silos, the families expressed their gratitude for the project, which enables them to safeguard their food crops throughout the year. 🌱



José Marroquín

At the time of the photo this large well was still being deepened by villagers digging in the pit. Now it is finished, providing water for eight Eslabón-Tamagás families.

Why Chacocente?

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 now working with communities in the Refuge's buffer zone as well.

Everyone is welcome to come to SCP meetings, held once a month at the Richland Hospital. Call Janet Gee at 608 588-3942 for meeting dates or information about the SCP.



José Marroquín

Celestino Martinez, Eslabón-Tamagás community leader

Partner Village: El Eslabón - El Tamagás

The five families of the Spring Green "Village Partners" group have committed to funding projects for three years in a new Santa Teresa twin rural community, El Eslabón-El Tamagás. Starting in January of this year, the group has pledged \$5,000 per year to provide basic health and education needs in this community, according to the villagers' priorities

Sister City Project vice-president José Marroquín visited the community in June. Here is his firsthand impression:

"June 19th Eslabón-Tamagás: Today Alma, Celestino Martinez and I went to see the projects that the SCP has in this community. I could see some finished latrines and some unfinished wells. People are still working on them. It has been very hard labor because they have found rocks. Yet, they are very happy in having us help them. They say the SCP has been a blessing from God. There is a big well where people are already getting water. It needs to be dug a little bit more and still needs a cover and pump. The people of these two communities are very united. When they call for a meeting, everyone shows up and is willing to work on any needed project. They don't expect to be paid for labor. My conclusion at this point is that it's a good idea to work with them since no one has helped them before. These people are extremely poor."

As of now, the projects have been completed. Five wells have been dug and reinforced, their lids made, and rope pumps installed. Ten latrines were built, and water filters were given to 10 families. The bricks used for the projects were made in nearby El Terrero. In addition, the children in the Eslabón-Tamagás elementary school received school supplies." 🌱

Children's Visit, continued

the 189 schoolchildren, made them welcome, and gave them their t-shirts. They placed their handprints on the banner with a promise to care for the sea turtles. We did face-painting for the kids, and (Chacocente education guide) Ariel Arteaga talked with them about the sea turtles and their problems. Then we walked down to the nesting beach, where the children were so excited to get to know the ocean, despite the fact that we didn't find baby turtles. We saw two dead adult turtles, and the children understood that these turtles died as a result of bad actions on the part of human beings. I was glad that they could understand the hard reality of the sea turtles' life. The children were not disappointed with their day, it was a field trip full of surprises and emotion. They rated it as Excellent."

"The next day, the arribada began, and we went with just a few children to see this. By today, Friday, we could not get to the beach. The Escalante River was so full of rushing water that a pick-up had been washed away in the current. In the past two days, over 10,200 turtles have arrived at the beach to lay their eggs."

We thank the Raechel and Jackie Foundation for their support. Education of young people is the key to changing public attitudes towards sea turtles and the natural world. 🌿



Alma Susana Chávez

Banners from the Children's Visit: "I promise to care for and protect the sea turtles of Chacocente."

Our annual appeal letter will land in your mailbox in the next few weeks. However, you don't have to wait till then to donate! Donations to support the work of the Sister City Project are always gratefully accepted. They may be sent to the Sister City Project, PO Box 483, Richland Center, WI 53581.



Jane Furchgott

Peter Smith talking with Derrick Gee by the old La Poma school, 2003

Remembering Peter

by Jane Furchgott

In May we received the sad news of Peter Smith's death in Maine, where his family now lives.

Peter had returned to Santa Teresa in 2011, and had begun setting up his own projects in two rural Santa Teresa villages. His worsening health made it hard for him to continue supervising the work.

As many of you remember, we have Peter to thank for starting most of our community and sea turtle conservation projects in Chacocente Wildlife Refuge. An ex-Amish farmer and mechanic, he volunteered to act as our project coordinator in Santa Teresa from 2000 to 2003. Despite the initial language barrier, he was able to relate well to the Chacocente campesinos and help them organize. Peter found great poverty and health problems in the Chacocente villages, where there were few sources of clean water.

Wells were the first priority, and SCP sent funds for the materials, while community members (and Peter himself) did the construction. He encouraged building small health centers (still in use), and training local women in natural medicine. He worked with the community of Escalante to construct their first school ever, funded by the SCP. Peter helped set up the first Chacocente leatherback hatchery and bravely did a public exposé of Chacocente's sea turtle egg trafficking.

Peter continued to be a true friend of the Sister City Project. He appreciated our dedication to build on his efforts to improve life for the people of Chacocente. He generously supported the SCP with his money as well as his time. The people in Chacocente loved Peter, and he in turn told us that those years spent in Nicaragua were some of the happiest of his life. 🌿



José Marroquin

Three of this year's secondary scholarship students: Maycol Traña from El Terrero; Bianca Reyes and Cipriano Traña from La Chota

Education Program, 2013

Our SCP focus on education continues. School supplies were given to 186 children in the five Chacocente village schools, and a storage cabinet was delivered to each school. We also help fund the hot lunch program, to which the school garden produce has been adding vitamins and extra nutrition.

Various parents and other community adults help the teachers and children with the school gardens. Antonio Cerda, market gardener of La Chota, helped start the school garden seedlings in his plastic greenhouse. He also planted some of the SCP watermelon seed on his own land---and harvested 60 large watermelons, a great treat for all the schoolchildren.

The secondary scholarship program is going well. There are 19 recipients this year, twelve boys and seven girls, all keeping their grade average above 80%.

In 2009, when the SCP funded a new roof for the El Terrero school, the community asked for enough metal roofing material to extend the building by an extra room. This space, although not finished, housed the El Terrero preschool. In 2013, SCP donations were given for the materials to complete the classroom. Brick walls, a cement floor, and an outside sidewalk have now replaced the preschool's former skeletal plank walls and dirt floor. 🌱



Stein Goering

SCP Endowment Fund

by Derrick Gee

On September 14, 2012 our project lost a dear friend, Joel Gaalswyk. He was well known throughout our area as an active and compassionate supporter of a cleaner environment, of helping those less fortunate than himself, and of open and fair government. He had traveled to Nicaragua. Joel's many annual donations to SCP were always received with not only gratitude but also joyful amusement. He never rounded up a figure or rounded it down. He knew exactly what he could afford to give to us and to others and the answer always ended in not only quite a lot of dollars but also a few cents!

Your board was stunned into silence when a letter from Joel's attorney told of his bequest to our project of \$24,618.69. This was by far the largest gift that our small organization had received in its 26-year history.

After careful consideration, we determined that we would use Joel's gift to initiate an endowment fund. The earnings from the fund's investments will be used each year to better the aims of SCP. It is intended that the capital amount will remain in place so that Joel's gift will 'keep on giving" to our work.

We would encourage you to follow Joel's generous example by remembering SCP in your will, or by making a gift to the endowment fund now.

More details are available from our secretary, Janet Gee, at curanto99@hotmail.com, (608) 588-3942, or c/o Sister City Project, PO Box 483, Richland Center, WI 53581. 🌱

Before and after — views of the El Terrero preschool classroom.



José Marroquin

José Marroquin



Escalante parents, scholarship students, and oxen preparing the school garden for planting.



Alma Susana Chávez

Proud to be the first in his community to finish building a latrine.

Our SCP website is <http://santa-teresa.wccnica.org> — check it out and see the newsletter photos in full color. All our past newsletters are available to read online, along with announcements of upcoming events. If you'd like to receive the electronic Sister City Update (with full color photos!) before the paper copies even arrive, email us at santa-teresa@wccnica.org to let us know. Visit us on Facebook! (Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project)

SCP Junta Directiva: Featuring our Board members

Our SCP Directors don't just sit back in their meeting chairs. We thought you might like to know a little about the people you are trusting to transform your generous donations into good work. Thank you to everyone who donates and makes our work possible!! Here are two of our eleven board members:



Derrick Gee

Born in the industrial Midlands of England, his passions from early days were farming and the outdoors. At Leeds University he majored in farm management and met his future wife, Janet. Derrick's working career centered on developing better lines of swine. Introducing these pigs to the American farmer brought Derrick

and his family to Spring Green WI. An inveterate traveler, Derrick has worked with farmers in 30 countries, and had adventures in Mongolia, Greenland, Arctic Scandinavia and other mostly-cold locations. Derrick and Janet have worked together on numerous local community projects, and as SCP board members for 13 years, making ten trips to Nicaragua. Derrick was SCP President from 2007 to 2010. His business knowledge helped us organize as a more formal NGO, able to run and keep close track of expanding programs in Nicaragua. Derrick believes that the SCP gives a broader range of life options to less fortunate, but eternally grateful people, and does so in a way that makes the best use of supporters' dollars.

Maggie May

Maggie grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She first became involved in Nicaragua in 1999, participating in her college's semester-long service learning program in Managua, Nicaragua. She lived with a host family and worked with disabled children while studying Spanish, Nicaraguan history, and politics. Maggie currently works part-time as a school psychologist in the Ithaca, WI schools and full-time as a mom to Rowan, age 3 and Conor, age 1. Her husband, David, is a family physician at the Richland Medical Center. Maggie has been back to Nicaragua several times, and hopes that the entire family will be able to travel to Santa Teresa when the children are a little older. A member of the Sister City Board since 2011, Maggie does an important job, checking and reconciling our financial transactions in Santa Teresa.



Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project
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BURRITO SUPPER & DANCE

You are invited to our 19th annual benefit Burrito Supper & Dance on Friday evening, October 25th. 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 cakes and pies...all you can eat.

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. Dances will be taught and all ages are welcome.

A suggested donation of \$12 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.



José Marroquin

Portrait of Maria Justina, from Chacocente's La Chota community

Newsletter Production: Jane Furchgott and Sue Furchgott,
with help from Laura Coglan.