

SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 42

Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project

October 2014

Sea Turtle Symposium

by Jane Furchgott

Sister City Project Nicaragua coordinator Alma Susana Chávez and I presented our work at the 2014 International Sea Turtle Symposium. This meeting was held in April in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Alma Susana has a passion for protecting sea turtles and the environment. Because developing native biologists and conservation leaders is important for Nicaragua, I asked Alma if she would like to attend an international sea turtle symposium, meeting and learning from people working with sea turtles around the world. She said this had been a dream of hers.

I had attended several previous symposiums for the SCP, but had never presented a paper at these mainly scientific events. Alma and I were excited to have our abstracts accepted, and made plans to attend together. Thanks to several generous individuals, Alma's travel expenses were met, and she received a symposium grant for free lodging at the hotel.

Since the general sessions were in English, which Alma does not speak well, I presented our co-authored oral paper with slides, "Change in Chacocente: A small Wisconsin humanitarian organization promotes sea turtle conservation." People told me they liked seeing how much the SCP had been able to do independently, with our relatively tiny budget.

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Michael Kienitz

Wash day for Francisca and Brenda at their El Papalón well — mainly clothes, but kids, too. This year SCP provided materials for 16 wells and 25 rope pumps to rural Santa Teresa families.

Video Team Visits Chacocente

by Julie Andersen

In late April this year I had the opportunity to visit Santa Teresa. While I had visited the town several times in the 1990's, this was my first trip through the rural communities to the coast, and I was excited to learn more about the far-reaching work of the Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project (SCP). I was joining Jeanne Duffy, WCCN North American Operations Director, and photographer Michael Kienitz as we shot footage for WCCN's 30th anniversary video. This was the first day of our trip and the SCP was an auspicious place to start the video. The ongoing people-to-people/community-to-community relationships of the SCP embody the spirit in which WCCN was founded and how both organizations continue to grow and thrive in creative ways.

Alma Susana Chávez joined us on this journey, sporting a sister-city turtle t-shirt. She was a great guide, pointing out evidence of the SCP's work as we bumped and jolted along the roads. Her knowledge of and love for the area and the communities was obvious as she drew our attention to latrines, wells, and schools that have been supported through the SCP. Along the way we met up with a truck laden with supplies purchased with SCP donations as it dropped off bags of cement in several places for future well or latrine

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Jane Furchgott

Alma Susana Chávez stands by her poster presentation at the International Sea Turtle Symposium: "Women Transformed: From Poachers to Conservationists and Entrepreneurs."

Sea Turtle Symposium, continued

Alma presented her work with the tejedoras, Chacocente area women whom she taught to crochet strips of used colored plastic bags into beautiful handbags and craft items, and to organize their own successful cooperative business. She was asked to speak on this at the special Latin American day with Spanish speakers, and to present a poster of the project for the general meeting. The issues of terrestrial plastic pollution, marine animals eating toxic plastics, and finding new income sources for women who were formerly turtle egg poachers, were all addressed in Alma's project, begun with the support of FFI (Fauna and Flora International.) People from around the world were inspired by her project. For a moving video of Alma and these women, go to this link:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fWG7ZgOU14

Some main themes of the symposium were the problems of the world's fisheries and the effects of climate change. Industrial fishing is the human activity which kills the most sea turtles. Trawl and gill net bycatch, longline hooks, and fishing with explosives kill thousands of sea turtles each year. The symposium focused on working with fishermen worldwide to improve the situation. Creative solutions and innovations in equipment, often suggested by fishermen themselves, can make a difference. Global warming is causing more female sea turtles to be born than males, since sex determination of turtle embryos is temperature dependent.

I was happy to share a hotel room with friends from *Paso Pacífico* and FFI, two organizations doing great work in Nicaragua, and reconnect with Central American turtle colleagues.



In Nicaragua, the olive ridley sea turtle *arribada* (mass nesting) season will be reaching its peak in October. The SCP has contributed batteries, rubber boots, and ponchos for the community guards working to monitor and protect Chacocente's sea turtles. I just received an email from Jeffer Cruz, director of the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge, saying, "We've had lots of work at the Refuge beach, because the turtles are coming in strong in all phases of the moon. I've had to stay constantly at the station without going home to Santa Teresa. So far we have protected 18,006 nests. We are expecting another *arribada* of 10,000 turtles tonight." Jeffer and Alma will soon be taking the Chacocente schoolchildren on a field trip to the nesting beach. 🌿

Video Team, continued

construction. But, the majority of the load was for the Chacocente volunteer fire-fighting crew. The dry landscape and rough roads made it obvious to us that an out-of-control fire could cause a lot of damage with little chance that any of the official firefighters from town would be able to reach the rural communities in time to do much good. Well-prepared volunteer firefighters, such as you find in many small towns in the U.S., provide a valuable service in controlling fires in rural Santa Teresa.

About a dozen men of a variety of ages arrived to unload the wheelbarrows, hardhats, shovels, safety vests, and face masks from the truck, and reloaded them onto an ox-cart to be taken to storage elsewhere. They quickly tried out the equipment, donning the vests, hats and masks – no sense missing a photo op! I admire these men willing to take some big risks to keep their community safe from wild fires. And, I admire the people in both Santa Teresa and the Richland Center area who work hard and dream big to expand what it means to be a community beyond borders. 🌿

Author of this article, Julie Andersen, is former executive director, now a board member, of WCCN. This Madison, WI organization, once the Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua, now Working Capital for Community Needs (www.wccn.org), has had 27 years of mutual support and friendship with our SCP.



Michael Krenitz

Chacocente community fire brigades receive new equipment, to be taken to their villages by oxcart. Our thanks to the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers/Madison for their grant to fund the gear!

Our SCP website is <http://santa-teresa.wccnica.org>. Past newsletters can be read online, along with announcements of upcoming events. If you'd like to receive the electronic *Sister City Update* (with full color photos!), email us at santa-teresa@wccnica.org to let us know. **Visit us on Facebook!** (Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project)



Some of this year's 23 secondary scholarship students at the José Martí secondary school in La Pitilla, Chacocente buffer zone. Most of the recipients attend this school.

Scholarship Students Active in Community Work

by Marilyn Rinehart

An especially dry growing season in the Chacocente area has given the secondary scholarship students plenty of opportunity to fulfill their community service requirement. "I water the school garden in La Chota" and "I worked watering the fruit plants at the Escalante School" are typical comments in their reports of community service. Other students reported fence building, preparing the soil, or planting seeds, along with the usual tasks of cleaning the school or the school grounds.

First semester grade reports show a few students struggling in mathematics and foreign language. We hope these students will be able to achieve the required 80% level by the end of their second semester in November.

The monthly portion of the \$250 scholarship is given to the families of the students who qualified at the beginning of their school year in February. Our support for students to go on for secondary education has grown from three students in 2011 to 23 students in 2014. Several donors have committed the necessary \$250 per student per year for five years of secondary school. The remainder comes from annual contributions. Please consider being a five-year sponsor. For more information go to our website: www.santa-teresa.wccnica.org/education or email SCPScholar@gmail.com. 🌱

Drought Strikes Nicaragua

by Sally Dahir, SCP board member who has encouraged biointensive gardening trials in her Partner Village, La Pita

Nicaragua is experiencing its worst dry spell in 32 years, most likely due to *El Niño*. A 50% reduction in rainfall coupled with an increase in temperature of 11-13° F have destroyed food crops and driven up prices of staples such as beans and corn.

Livestock are also dying by the thousands. As many as 2,500 cattle in Nicaragua alone have starved to death since the onset of the drought in May. A further 600,000 cattle are at risk if the severe dry spell persists. Unfortunately, experts think it will.

There were several consequences of the drought in the villages of Chacocente this year. A number of the wells have gone dry, including some at the schools. This is a huge problem not only for drinking water but also for cooking and for watering school gardens. In addition, newly constructed wells had to be dug deeper than in the past.

Many farmers haven't planted second crops yet for fear of lack of rain. There will be very little harvest from the first planting season of May through August. If rains do not arrive in September and October, most families will be without food for the coming year.

One approach to the continual problem of drought in these communities is a new project called Biointensive Gardening. Not only vegetable gardens, but staple crops like corn, beans and rice, as well as fruit and nut trees, benefit from this approach.

The method uses 67-88% less water than conventional farming. This is achieved mainly by incorporating large amounts of water-retaining organic matter deep into the soil. Also, plants are grown close together to keep the ground shaded and prevent further water loss.

This year's biointensive garden got off to a good start with Alma Susana coordinating the project with a farmer in the Partner Village of La Pita. Several compost piles and raised beds were constructed. The soil was excavated to a depth of two feet using a spading fork, and the organic matter incorporated. Peppers, tomatoes, carrots and onions were planted this year and, with the help of irrigation, have started producing. Hopefully we can expand this project next year. 🌱

Over the Fence

by Derrick Gee

It's easy for any organization — our place of work, our church — to focus on day-to-day issues and ignore what long-term changes are taking place “over the fence.”

On a recent visit to Costa Rica, Nicaragua's southern neighbor, and to our Sister City projects just 50 miles away, I was trying to see what long-term changes might be taking place over that fence and what responsive actions our project should be considering. For example:

- **Costa Rica eco-tourism**

The United Nations ranks Costa Rica fifth in the world for “environmental sustainability.” Though there are vast areas of national parks with strict limits on human activity, there are other areas of the various forest ecotypes that are privately owned and where the owners have tourism businesses that have met government standards. What could the SCP learn from these government/business partnerships that could stimulate eco-tourism and, therefore, jobs and income for the families with whom we work?

- **Inter-oceanic canal**

For decades, Nicaragua has considered building an alternative to the Panama Canal connecting the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. It would follow a route just north of Costa Rica, passing through the huge Lake Nicaragua and joining the Pacific about 30 miles south of our Chacocente refuge. The consensus of the people I met suggests that the project is now closer to realization. This raises major environmental issues but would create thousands of jobs on the doorstep of Chacocente.

- **Electric grid**

Much closer to home, the power grid is coming to some of our communities. The infrastructure is in place but the switch has yet to be flipped. The plan excludes the more remote villages and those in the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge. What action will the people of the excluded villages take as they look over the fence at their connected neighbors?

- **Resort development**

With the global economic downturn starting in 2007/08, the development of resorts along the Nicaraguan Pacific coast came to a virtual standstill. Now, the pace has picked up. Just as with the prospective canal, resort development creates jobs for the families of the subsistence farmers who are our project focus but also creates environmental threats.

Your SCP Board will be looking over these fences as it works with the communities to develop plans for 2015. 🌿



Allyn Oh

Derrick Gee and family members touring the La Pita bio-intensive garden.

Medical Equipment Bound for Sister City Clinic

The new Santa Teresa Health Center is a beautiful building with almost no equipment. There were no funds to furnish it. SCP board members Linda Stadler and Elizabeth Pflug-Froh are coordinating plans to send a 40-foot container filled with equipment to the health center by the end of this year. We have received a generous donation to make this a reality, and are working with the Cornerstone Alliance Navigators to fill the container with gently used basic equipment. This Madison, WI organization takes in medical supplies and facilitates shipments to Central America. The Richland Hospital has also donated some equipment. Linda and Elizabeth, both health care professionals, plan to be in Santa Teresa for the delivery of the shipment. 🌿



Michael Kientz

Preschool boy — the Sister City Project provides supplies for kids in six rural community schools.

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

¿Dónde está Juanita?

SCP Board member Derrick Gee visited Santa Teresa in July, along with his daughter Liz Oh, her husband Allyn, and their children Simon and Graham. Here are the boys' impressions:

• Simon Oh, age 14 —

This was a very eye-opening, fun, and interesting trip. I learned a lot of different things! After growing up in a first world country all my life, it's very different seeing what it's like in a third world country. At home I can easily get up, walk to the kitchen, turn on the faucet and get some water. However, in all of the villages, these people have to walk outside, crank the well to get the water in a bucket, and then filter it back in their house. The SCP is a really big help to the village people, because they don't have to walk two to three miles to get water anymore and now they have private latrines!

When we arrived we were greeted by Alma Susana, who led us through Santa Teresa and the three Partner Villages. The people we met were friendly and really appreciative of everything the SCP has done. One thing that surprised me,

and I will never forget, is how much these people missed Juanita, a.k.a. Janet Gee, a.k.a. Nana. Everywhere we would go you would hear "¿Dónde está Juanita?" (Where is Janet?), or "¿Cómo está Juanita?" (How is Janet?) It makes me really understand how much work my grandparents and the SCP have done, and how important the work and the people of the SCP are to these villagers' lives.

• Graham Oh, age 11 —

On our trip to Nicaragua we went to three villages, La Pita, El Eslabón, and El Tamagáz to see what our donations have done. We saw all the wells and latrines. Ten wells were the goal, and they made 15. They also made more than the goal with the latrines. We also visited gardens that used compost.

I was surprised how far they had to walk for water, and how excited they were to get the well and latrines. It was a really great trip that made me appreciate what I have. 🌱

Everyone is welcome 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.

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. Here are two of our twelve board members:

Jane Furchgott

Jane was born in New York City, lived in St Louis, Missouri as a child, and majored in art history in college. After a brief period in art school in NYC, she apprenticed as a painting conservator. She and partner Charles Munch pursued this career for 40 years, restoring old master paintings. She now does breeding bird surveys for the Wisconsin DNR. Jane loves nature and forests, and the environmental aspects of the SCP have inspired her work for sea turtle conservation. She held the SCP together in the years following the Contra War, and was president from 2000 to 2006, the years beginning our focus on Chacocente Wildlife Refuge and its villages. Jane edits this newsletter and is in charge of the Burrito Supper. Since 1989 she has made ten trips to Santa Teresa. She has lived in rural SW Wisconsin for 30 years, growing a big garden each summer.



Janet Gee

Born in England during World War II, Janet went on to obtain a university degree in French and Spanish, and to eventually become a high school foreign languages teacher. As a student she made many visits to France and Spain, including a year teaching English in the French Pyrenees, and a trimester studying at the University of Barcelona. After emigrating to Wisconsin in 1976 with husband Derrick and children David and Liz, Janet taught Spanish for 17 years at the River Valley High School in Spring Green. When they retired Derrick and Janet decided they wanted to work with local volunteer groups, to travel, and to use their past experience to help others. They joined the SCP Board in 2000 and have visited Nicaragua about ten times. Janet has been board secretary for eight years, trip interpreter, great recordkeeper, and correspondent with staff on the ground in Santa Teresa.

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

You are invited to our 20th annual Burrito Supper & Dance on Friday evening, October 24. It will take place at North Central Station (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.
- 7:00 silent auction, 7:15 Santa Teresa slide show
- Starting at 7:30, the Kettle Creek String Band 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 (608) 583-2431 or Mary Bard at (608) 647-2594.

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



Michael Kienitz

A young man lays bricks for his family's new well. SCP funds bought the materials, and the family provides the labor. A donation of \$310 will pay for materials for one well, its cover, and a rope pump.

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.