

# SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 44

Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project

October 2015



José Marroquin

A Chacocente woman with her household water filter. This year the SCP provided these clay filters to 15 more families. They are especially important in a drought situation, with well water levels low and containing sediment.

## A Day in the Life of an Intern

by Rita Clark, SCP short-term intern

Trekking through the forest from the MARENA (Nicaragua's DNR) field station to the *arribada* beach in Chacocente was a perfect introduction to the world of coastal field research and government conservation work. To my right I see a colorful display of light, hundreds of thousands of stars and their reflection on the ocean water. To my left, dozens of sea turtles pulling their way from the Pacific to nest on the very shores from which they hatched at least fifteen years ago. Our clocks mark midnight, and we have officially begun our first shift.

The rangers determine that the volume of nesting allows us to re-bury the eggs, and I am quickly tasked with the relocation process. I am taught to recognize egg-laying behavior and to approach and extract the eggs, producing minimal stress on the birthing parent. With my left hand holding the newly laid olive ridley eggs, my right hand digs an oval-shaped chamber, some 50 meters away from the discernible turtle tracks. I plant the nest (over 120 eggs)

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## Fifteen Years of Change

by Jane Furchgott

This Sister City Update is all about Change — a new Burrito Supper site, a shift in the Chacocente sea turtle protection, and a severe drought linked to climate change. It was exactly 15 years ago that the Sister City Project (SCP) began its work with Chacocente Wildlife Refuge. We have witnessed many changes since then.

In the fall of 2000, our dedicated Wisconsin volunteer Peter Smith was just beginning to get to know people and the situation in the communities within Chacocente's dry tropical forest. Nearly half the people were illiterate, some areas lacked schools altogether, and no secondary education was accessible. Over half the families had no latrines, and there were few real wells — most people used holes near the riverbank or the rivers themselves for water. In the dry season women went far on horseback to do laundry. These subsistence farmers used slash-and-burn methods, yet there was no equipment to put out unintentional forest fires. There was no doctor in the area. The sea turtle numbers were declining, their eggs a major commodity.

Even then the Chacocente Refuge, in the rain shadow of the continental divide mountain range, was sometimes plagued by periods of drought or torrential rains. Erosion and deforestation were widespread on the marginal farmland within the Refuge's dry tropical forest.

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Rita Clark

Endangered olive ridley sea turtle coming to nest on Chacocente's beach. During Rita Clark's stay, park rangers were relocating turtle eggs during a small *arribada*, to avoid predation by poachers and animals.

## 15 Years, continued

Peter Smith's two-year stay established our close connection with Chacocente and its people, and the kind of projects we still support. Working with materials provided by the SCP, most families now have wells, latrines and water filters. Soil conservation has been taught, fire brigades exist. New schools have been built, and almost all area children attend pre-school through sixth grade. This year 29 young people are taking advantage of our secondary scholarship program. Doctor visits and training of village health volunteers have improved people's health. Sea turtle protection is very effective, and people have more positive attitudes towards their preservation.

We and the Chacocente villagers agree these are all positive changes, improving their life. But global warming is already affecting us all, in ways that are more or less life-threatening. Climate extremes, such as the El Niño effect, are becoming more frequent and prevalent.

Nicaragua's 2014 drought has continued through 2015's first planting season. Farmers who planted crops in the spring have lost them. Others have waited until now to plant, the rainiest months usually being September and October. At the request of the Chacocente farmers, the SCP has given \$25 worth of seed, fertilizer, or tools to each producer. Because of scant harvests in last year's drought, most do not have seed saved for this year.



Alma Susana Chávez

*Biointensive gardeners at a training session. This gardening method uses deep cultivation and water-retaining organic matter to create more drought-resistant soil structure.*

Our Nicaraguan coordinator, Alma Susana Chávez, tells us that now, as of September, many of the wells are dry, and if there is water, that's for the family, not the crops. The school gardens have suffered, seedlings still being watered in their flats rather than set out in the garden's heat. The new bio-intensive gardening project, where water-retaining compost is worked deep into the soil, is on hold, although some gardeners have beds in production.

The situation is very serious. Alma says she is beginning to see signs of lack of food and water in the children. We have been asked by the Chacocente women for family food



Alma Susana Chávez

*A boy eats lunch in a village school. Both the government and the SCP help provide food for the children, assuring them of at least one good meal a day.*

packets, but have not committed to anything more than the supplemental nutritious food we have been adding to the government's school lunches. We are looking for other organizations that might be giving emergency food aid, but most large relief organizations work through national governments. Fortunately, the Nicaraguan government has now added milk to its school rations within the country's "dry corridor" which includes Santa Teresa.

Ironically, we have just found out that electric power lines have just reached three of the Chacocente communities. Village life could become more modern and easier, but adaptation to this severe drought will test the resourcefulness and stamina of the farmers and their families. We are all anxiously awaiting the usual fall rainy season. Two SCP board members will be visiting Santa Teresa in November, and will see the situation firsthand. Their insights will guide our future decisions. 🌱



Ariel Arteaga

*Chacocente firefighters in a practice drill. The drought increases the danger of forest fire. Our thanks to the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers/Madison for funding the new equipment! This year we have also received their grant to help with construction of a small village health clinic.*

# Sister City Board Holds Annual Retreat

by Marilyn Rinehart

The SCP Board is made up of twelve members whose active involvement ranges from two years to 28 years. Founding member Stein Goering and early recruit Jane Furchgott continue to be among the most active.

In recent years, the Board has met monthly for regular business, and has held an annual retreat to build a shared perspective of our work, both in Santa Teresa and here in the greater Richland area. Our focus this year was: How can we maintain our mission to promote self-sufficiency over dependency in the Santa Teresa communities?

Barbara Alvarado joined us, offering her perspective and insights from work in Arcatao, El Salvador. Barbara, who lived in Mexico for 25 years, has been working with El Salvador since 1996. Arcatao has been a Sister City with Madison since 1986. She offered guidelines for working in a community.

First, Barbara advised us to “listen deeply” to the people there. Next, she reminded us of the importance of organizing — working with other local, regional, and national groups. She recommended having a strict format for “sistering” especially as regards managing money. The goal is mutual solidarity of the community, not individual gain.



Alma Susana Chávez

*SCP president, José Marroquin, at right, listens to community members in La Poma*

Her third suggestion was to restrain the emigration of youth by emphasizing community improvements. Local leaders may need help with strategies to build their economies and social systems so that young people will remain there or return after their post-secondary education.

Barbara described that her organization’s work has involved helping people get titles to their land, forming co-ops for marketing their products, and providing scholarships for post-secondary education. Discussion

followed around the ideas of promoting more community leadership, supporting self-direction, and encouraging youth to seek training that would be helpful in the communities. ✨



Alma Susana Chávez

*Some of the 29 secondary scholarship students. Almost all will keep the 80% grade average necessary to retain the scholarship.*

## Medical Equipment Shipment Update

by Marilyn Rinehart

One year ago we were optimistic that we would be able to send a 40-foot container of medical equipment to the new health center in Santa Teresa. Linda Stadler and Elizabeth Pflug-Froh spent hours of work, not only selecting and packing large and small items, but also creating a detailed inventory for customs. After several months it became clear that our shipment would either be denied or held up in customs for an indefinite period.

Elizabeth, persistent in finding a way to make it happen, discovered Project Cure. This group has four warehouses throughout the US and has sent 17 shipments to Nicaragua in the past, although recently they have also not been able to ship into Nicaragua. Project Cure has informed Elizabeth that they will try to ship the equipment to Nicaragua or some other Central American country.

Linda and Elizabeth kept back smaller items to take to Santa Teresa this November. We thank these two health care professionals for the many days of work they have given to this project.

Our thanks also go to the very generous donor who supported us in attempting this project. Her money will now be used for a new Partner Village, secondary school scholarships, and a much needed water system for a village of 100 people. ✨

**Everyone is welcome** at SCP meetings, held once a month at the Richland Hospital. Call Marilyn Rinehart at (608) 347-5473 for dates or information about the SCP.

# Sea Turtle Protection Reorganized

by Jane Furchgott

After seven years of excellent leadership as Director of Chacocente Wildlife Refuge for MARENA (Nicaragua's DNR), Jeffer Cruz has retired from his position. We will miss his friendship and his dedication to sea turtle and forest conservation, as well as to environmental education in the village schools.

While it is uncertain when MARENA may appoint another Refuge director, in the meantime the direction of the sea turtle protection is in the hands of Karla Hernandez, the government environmental delegate for Carazo (Santa Teresa's political Department), and a committee made up of Chacocente community leaders, property owners, NGO's working in the area, and government institutions such as the mayor's office, police, and the Nicaraguan army and navy. This is a resurgence of the collaborative management committee promoted by Fauna and Flora International (FFI) several years ago.

In the past ten years the guard staff at the reserve has become largely made up of people from the Chacocente communities. This year there will be 15 park rangers at work. As more and more local people take part in and understand sea turtle monitoring, the more likely they will be able to successfully co-manage these resources along with the government.

However, as Velkiss Gadea, FFI's sea turtle program coordinator notes, in the long term there must be someone responsible for other aspects of the refuge, such as agricultural issues, construction, illegal acts, and animal trafficking.

This year's arribada season has started. This mass-nesting activity of the olive ridley sea turtle is Chacocente's claim to fame, and the first large arribada in early September really initiated this season. 9,000 sea turtle nests have been excavated on the beach. Last



Alma Susana Chávez

Students and instructors, at the sea turtle monitoring protocol workshop for the community rangers held at Chacocente in July.

April, the FFI leatherback sea turtle hatchery, which SCP helps support, closed for the season after releasing 531 hatchlings to begin their nomadic life in the Pacific Ocean, a hopeful event for this extremely endangered species. 🌿



Catheryn Cardoza

July intern Rita Clark, from Managua, Nicaragua, a sophomore at Grinnell College in Iowa, works with a nesting sea turtle.

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



Stein Goering

Guadalupe, mother of the leatherback hatchery's work staff coordinator, with SCP board member Jane Furchgott. It was Guadalupe's 72nd birthday, in the house near the hatchery where she cooked for the rangers during the nesting season. She fixed a great breakfast for three visiting board members.

**Our SCP website is now <http://santa-teresa.org>.**

All our past newsletters are here, with announcements of events and information about our projects. If you would like to receive the electronic Sister City Update, with color photos, email us at [santa-teresa@wccn.org](mailto:santa-teresa@wccn.org).

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

*Intern, continued from page 1*

and carefully cover my own tracks before recording the count and continuing the process a couple dozen times.

When the clock marks 6 a.m., we return to the station, carrying in each hand a bucket filled with turtle eggs laid after sunrise, meant to be relocated into the MARENA nursery and hatchery. All rangers and interns are drained after an active 6-hour night shift, yet discussions are still lively as we share the customary cup of black coffee, and talk turtles a couple more hours into the morning before finally turning into bed.

I can truly say my short internship rendered me, a rising college sophomore pursuing a career in conservation science and marine biology, profoundly impressed. I was moved by both the dedication of the MARENA park rangers, often (yet always soulfully) working 18 hours a day, and the SCP partners committed to making their lives easier. I left this experience in awe of the patience, reverence, and dedication constantly demonstrated by both the park rangers, and in the most special way, the mother turtles themselves. I don't think I will ever forget the first time I saw a turtle lay her eggs, and look forward to one day when I, like them, return to Nicaragua and continue working towards the protection of our natural resources. 🌿

## New Burrito Supper Location, and a Village Market!

After many years of enjoying the festive atmosphere at Blue Highways, we are no longer able to use that hall due to the new owner's plan to make the space into apartments. While we are sad about the change, the positive side is that we will have more space, more parking, and no stairs. The new location, the Richland Community and Senior Center, is located at 1050 North Orange Street in Krouskop Park. This is by the 4-way stop at Orange and Sixth Streets where Highway 14 turns west out of Richland Center.

Having more space will allow us to move away from the silent auction to a VILLAGE MARKET. We invite people to donate fresh seasonal produce, preserves, hand-made crafts, and art objects with suggested prices on each item. Central American arts and crafts are especially encouraged. Large or small market items will be appreciated. Buyers will be able to pay immediately. If items are left past 8 p.m., bartering or even "haggling" might be considered! Please help to make this a success by bringing your donation when you come to the event. For information call Marilyn Rinehart at (608) 347-5473. 🌿

## SCP Junta Directiva: Our Board of Directors

*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 board members:*



### Linda Gentes

Linda grew up on a farm near Pontiac, Illinois. After graduating from the University of Illinois, she received a Master's degree in Continuing and Vocational Education from UW-Madison. She taught a few years,

then started a bed linen store in Highland Park, Illinois. After selling her very successful business, Linda and her husband moved to their summer place in Richland County, where she was a passionate flower gardener. Linda became the Director of Continuing Education at UW-Richland, and for three years the Director of the Campus's Central American Student Program, continuing to be in frequent contact with students from that area. After 20 years at the Campus, she became the Coordinator for the First Year Initiative, and along with her husband, Henk Newenhouse, had a venue for weddings and a guest house on their secluded farm. They both recently retired, and in 2014 Linda was elected a supervisor on the Richland County Board. She has been an SCP board member since 2013. 🌿

### Aaron Wunnicke

Aaron lives on the family farm in Bear Valley, Richland County. His mother, Andrea Kaiser, was one of the Sister City Project's main founders. Aaron joined the SCP board of directors in 2009 after traveling to Santa Teresa and Chacocente with his



wife, Chelsea. While there, they experienced the beautiful environment and hospitality of our Nicaraguan partners. "Seeing how significantly the work of the SCP helped people made us want to get more involved," says Chelsea, who is also active in the Project, and Aaron's alternate on the board. As a forester, Aaron is interested in the use of natural resources in Chacocente, and a good fit for our environmental and agriculture committees. He is a fluent Spanish speaker, with an interest in Latin America, and previous travels in Mexico and South America. Aaron and Chelsea recently welcomed their first child, Donnie, into the world. 🌿

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## BURRITO SUPPER & DANCE

You are invited to our 21st annual Burrito Supper & Dance on Friday evening, October 16, at a **NEW LOCATION**, the Richland Community Center, 1050 North Orange Street, 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.
- Village Market: Central American and Wisconsin crafts, local produce and preserves
- 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 (608) 583-2431.

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



Sally Dahir

Women at a well in La Pita, one of our "Partner Villages." **THANK YOU** to all our wonderful donors, for the Village Partners and the Secondary Scholarship Program, as well as to the general fund.

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.