

# SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 12

Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project

April 2000

## First-Hand Reports from Nicaragua

### Fiestas, Turtles and Rural Credit in Nicaragua

By Derrick and Janet Gee

We visited Nicaragua for ten days in January as members of a study group looking at micro-credit in rural areas organized by the Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua (WCCN). Having spent the week traveling in Managua, Rivas and the island of Ometepe, we took an extra two days to make our first visit to Santa Teresa where we were kindly taken care of by Mayor Jose Martinez and his family.

The timing of our visit to our sister city was perfect as they were celebrating their patron saint with a three-day fiesta. Being a cattle-raising area, the dirt streets were full of horses and cowboys, the rodeo was in full swing and the children were enjoying a mini-midway. With eighty-degree weather and no air-conditioning, the open doors and windows eased the passage of the all-night disco beat into our bedroom and the incessant firecrackers completed the wild-west atmosphere. The local band started up to welcome the dawn and the church bells called us to mass at eight!

(See *Fiestas...* on Page 2)



Pictured (clockwise from left): Janet Gee, Jeamileth and José Martínez, Sr. Gabriela Schwizer, Francisco Martínez

### April 7 Benefit to Feature Bergan Riley and the Wooden Nickel Orchestra

The Sister City project is pleased to announce that the Wooden Nickel Orchestra, conducted by Bergan Riley, will perform at our spring benefit event, scheduled for Friday, April 7 at Blue Highways in Richland Center. A full evening is planned, with a soup supper to be followed by a mini-concert and dance.

The Wooden Nickel Orchestra performs an eclectic collection of old-time country, bluegrass, and folk music. Their show will also include a selection of original songs from Bergan's recently released CD, entitled *Swing Me*.

Orchestra members include **Bergan Riley**, a singer-songwriter from Dodgeville, WI. She performs in concert and has also called barn dances around the Midwest. Her CD will be available for sale at the concert. Madison native **Doug Brown** has been a member of many local bands including Harmonious Wail and the Doug Brown Jazz Trio. He is an active studio musician, appearing on many local CDs. Bass player **Tom McCarty** is a longtime member of the dance band Little Vito and the Torpedos. **Tom Waselchuk** started his professional career with the bluegrass band Stone Oak. He is currently the leader of an old-time country band, the Dang-Its.

The event will begin at 6:00 with a meal of homemade soups, salad, breads, and desserts. At 7:30 you'll have a chance to sit back while Bergan and the Orchestra present a mini-concert for your listening pleasure. Then it will be time to get up and dance, as the band will provide music for called dances, waltzes, polkas, and swing. Dances will be taught and all ages are welcome.

Suggested donation for both the supper and dance is \$7.00 per adult or \$4.00 per child. Reduced rates can be negotiated for those who can't attend both events; family rates are also available. All proceeds after expenses will go directly to support the work of the Sister City Project.

**(Fiestas... from Page 1)**

With no Medicare, Medicaid or money, the suitcase of donated medication that we took delighted the mayor, as did the donated elementary school books and money to buy spectacles for the elderly and shoes for children who need them so they can attend school. The Mayor explained that the medicines would be sent out to the various communities in the municipality of Santa Teresa. Each has a "botiquín"- a place where they are kept in the charge of a person who has been trained to dispense them. It is very difficult for the poor to travel to Santa Teresa when they are sick or in the rainy season when the roads are difficult to use.

We discussed with Sr. Martinez priorities for developing the community. He explained that now is a critical moment. The Aleman government has withdrawn most of the state support for health, education and other welfare projects. There are problems with inflation, access to rural credit and very high interest rates for those who qualify to borrow. The following are Mayor Martinez's priorities:

**EDUCATION**

School supplies, money for shoes and food for poor children

**HEALTH**

There is a constant need for medicines most of which are either not available or too expensive. Money is needed to buy eyeglasses for the poor elderly people.

**JOB CREATION**

There are several ideas for this but training and money are needed.

Iguana production -- for food, leather and pets

Rabbits -- for food.

They believe they have markets for both.

Construction – Money to help repair roofs which were damaged in recent wind and rain storms.

**TURTLES**

The power-boat funded by Richland Center individuals and the sister city project has been useful in tracking down poachers of the Chacocente turtles and those who would like to sell the eggs. The Mayor's next step is to set up a responsible eco-tourism project along the coast so that the locals have a source of income other than turtle eggs. This will possibly involve setting up a Non-Governmental Organization which would work with the Mayor's office, the Richland Project and FAMU GTZ, an official German government program that aims to protect natural resources through education of the local people. The plan would

possibly include a nature trail, suitable local accommodation and local guides.

We left Santa Teresa with a clearer idea of their needs and priorities. Together with the rest of the country, this community is facing a harsh economic climate. Financial and technical support such as that which is being provided by the Sister City project is extremely important in these difficult times. Perhaps equally important are the relationships and understanding created when we can visit or communicate in various other ways. We in the US may have the proverbial milk and honey, but the Nicaraguans can sure put on a good fiesta!

**Four Weeks in Nicaragua**

by Peter Smith

Following is a short recap of my recent month long trip to Nicaragua. I arrived in Managua on 8 Jan and spent the next two weeks in the outlying mountains near Ciudad Dario, about 50 miles due north of Managua. I worked with a group called El Porvenir (2508 42nd St. Sacramento, CA 95817 (916) 736-3663), which specializes in very small-scale water, latrine and reforestation projects, which are carefully coordinated with the leaders and people of the communities, served. The communities always bear a significant part of the expense or whatever project is decided upon, and also provide all of the labor, except in the cases when brigades such as ours come to help. This participation on the part of the communities helps assure that the projects are needed and wanted, and makes for community satisfaction at their completion. El Porvenir has two full time couples working in Nicaragua, one in the Ciudad Dario area, and the other out of Estili, which is another 35 miles to the North. In our case, we (about 10 brigadistas) helped improve well areas and laundry facilities around two wells in a village (Casas Viejas) high in the mountains above Ciudad Dario. The isolation, self-sufficiency, simplicity and basic joyfulness of the people were a wonder to behold.

The third week of my trip I spent with a Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua (WCCN) delegation focusing on rural and agricultural credit. As many of you may know, WCCN's main effort is to borrow money from socially conscious lenders in the US, and in turn lend it to "micro lending" institutions in Nicaragua, who make it available to small borrowers (some loans are as small as \$50 to \$100). We spent most of our time around

*(Continued on next page)*

**(4 Weeks...from Page 2)**

Rivas, an agricultural center south of Managua, and on Ometepe Island, a unique volcanic island in the middle of Lake Nicaragua. Because of its very fertile volcanic soils, Ometepe has a highly developed agriculture centered around the production of plantains, beef, and coffee.

The last week of my trip, I spent at Spanish language school in Estili, which was very helpful to me. If someone is interested in learning Nicaraguan Spanish, I highly recommend it.

Finally, just before leaving. I was able to spend a morning in Santa Theresa, visiting with mayor Jose Martinez and others. The folk there were extremely cordial and as brief as the visit was, we got a lot out of it.

I came away with the impression that Santa Theresa is sort of a back water community forgotten by Managua (partly because they are Sandinista), but none the less, looking to what resources it has to improve its lot. The turtle beach (Chacocente) and eco tourism is still a focus, but they are also trying to revive a moribund agriculture through the establishment of an Agricultural Cooperative (which just last November won legal status from Managua). They seemed very proud of this accomplishment and anxious for us to see this as a window of opportunity for future cooperation and assistance on our part. As they pointed out, the farmers lack such basic things as seed, hoes, and in many cases, land. I want to keep the Sister City project informed about this situation as things develop.

### Project Status Report

Thanks to a very successful Burrito Supper benefit last October, as well as your generous donations, we have raised \$2000 to meet the \$2000 challenge grant mentioned in our last newsletter. This money, destined for an ongoing social and environmental project in Santa Theresa, has many exciting possibilities.

The first step towards preservation and community management of Chacocente Wildlife Refuge and its sea turtles would be the formation of a local Santa Theresa NGO (non-governmental organization). Any money coming from the U.S. for Chacocente would be channeled through this organization, and it would eventually co-manage the Refuge with the Nicaraguan government.

We hope to hire a young biologist with community development experience and a local person chosen by

Mayor Martinez to help the Santa Theresa municipality form the NGO. These two people will also collect information for a Chacocente resources management plan.

Working with Drs. Rob Horowich and Jon Lyon of Community Conservation, Inc., we have put together a grant request to help fund these efforts. Unfortunately, our initial submission was turned down by the Wildlife Preservation Trust. They liked our proposal, but didn't want to start work in Nicaragua right now. They encouraged us to apply to several other funding organizations. We will find out in the next month or so whether these applications are successful.

If we don't receive other large grants the Sister City Project will use the \$4000 to pay the two people working to form the NGO. We're determined to get the Chacocente protection project started this year, while Mayor Jose Martinez is still in office. Ideally we will receive a large grant from a donor organization to pay these salaries. In this case, the \$4000 will go to projects directly helping Santa Theresa's rural communities.

### Smith Plans Extended stay in Sta. Teresa

Project member Peter Smith, a farmer and mechanic from Hillsboro, WI, has offered to take on the role of Sister City liaison in Santa Theresa. Peter feels a calling to work in the third world, and because of our Sister City relationship has decided to focus on the Santa Theresa area. He has been there twice for brief visits. He plans to leave for Nicaragua around June 1<sup>st</sup> and will move to Santa Theresa after spending a month in language study in Estili.

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*Thanks to all those who contributed to the production of this issue, including Janet Gee, Peter Smith, Jane Furchgott, Mary Wunnicke, and Stein Goering. Special thanks to Rob Horowich for his continued contributions to the Chacocente grant efforts, despite his ongoing health problems. We are happy to report that Rob is up and around again. While he continues to undergo treatment, his prognosis is encouraging.*

## New Challenge Grant

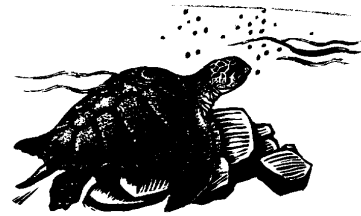
Two long-time project supporters, Jane Furchgott and Charles Munch, are offering a donation of \$1000 to the Sister City Project, on the condition that we can match this amount by June of this year. They are hoping this grant will help get the Chacocente project started as soon as possible.

If you wish to contribute financially to the Sister City Project, you can make a deposit in the Santa Teresa Fund account at the Richland County Bank, or leave your contribution with Tom Bachman at the Brewer Library. Donations can also be mailed to the Sister City Project in care of the Brewer Library, 325 North Central, Richland Center, WI 53581. Checks should be made out to the Santa Teresa Fund.

We also invite all interested persons to attend our meetings and would welcome active participation at any level. Right now we could use folks to help out with our upcoming benefit. If you would be willing to contribute soup, bread or a dessert, or if you could assist with serving or cleanup on the night of the benefit, please call Peggy Swan. For general information about the project, or to get on the list to be notified about meetings, contact Jane Furchgott or Stein Goering.

### Sister City Contacts

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 sgoering@uwc.edu




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Richland Center - Santa Teresa  
 Sister City Project  
 %Brewer Library  
 Richland Center, WI 53581

## SISTER CITY BENEFIT

### SOUP SUPPER AND DANCE

Music by **Bergan Riley and the  
 Wooden Nickel Orchestra**

**Friday, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2000**  
**Supper at 6:00 PM**  
**Music starts at 7:30**

**Blue Highways**  
**165 N. Central**  
**Richland Center, WI**

**Suggested Donation:**  
**\$7.00 Adult - \$4 Under 12**