

SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 17

Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project

May 2002

Benefit Supper Set for June 7

The Sister City Project Education Committee is hosting a benefit soup supper and dance on Friday, June 7. Food will be served from 5:30-7:00 PM, with the dance to begin at 7:30. The location is Blue Highways, 165 N. Central, Richland Center.

The suggested donation of \$5.00 per person will cover both the meal and dance. Supper will include soups of many varieties, breads, salads, beverages, and desserts -- everything homemade.

The Kettle Creek Band will play old time music and teach dances.

All proceeds after expenses will be used to buy books and school supplies for the children in our Sister City region.



Santa Teresa schoolgirl. Photo by Jane Furchgott

RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS GIVE MONEY FOR WELLS

The Madison chapter of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers has awarded the Sister City Project \$500 to be used for well improvement and rope pumps in La Pouma, a village in the Chacocente buffer zone.

This Madison group raises money through sales of its beautiful international photo calendar. The money is used to give grants to projects "consistent with self-development of people."

Volunteers president Brad Hinkfuss was glad to learn about the Sister City Project, as it fits his organization's guidelines perfectly. He encouraged us to submit another project proposal in the fall.

A CHILD HEALED

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES IN CHACOCENTE by Jane Furchgott

When I visited Chacocente last year, a woman named Sandra Obando brought her baby girl, Ana Gabriela, to the Association meeting to ask for help. Although Ana's face looked normal on the outside, when she opened her mouth I could see a large hole through the top of her mouth -- a cleft palate.

After returning to the U.S., I contacted an organization called Healing the Children. They send delegations of doctors and nurses to Nicaragua, holding clinics and performing free operations for poor children. I was told that the baby would have to be at least a year old before she could have reconstructive surgery.

This April, the Illinois Chapter of Healing the Children sponsored a clinic in Rivas, a city not far from Santa Teresa, where they operated on Ana Gabriela. When I last heard from Peter, the baby was in Rivas recovering from the successful operation.

This child was lucky. The cost of surgery in Nicaragua is a small fraction of the U.S. price, but it's still far more than a Chacocente campesino can afford.

Out of generosity towards his friends at Chacocente, Peter Smith has personally paid for many medical emergencies and major operations. He helps villagers get to a doctor and negotiate the complexities of Nicaragua's health care system. He usually asks the community to pay 10% of the cost and he pays the rest.

The policy of the Sister City Project is to direct our funds toward efforts that support whole communities, and to sustainable projects that will benefit people after our funding ends. As a group, we currently do not provide financial support for Peter's individual charities.

However, individual supporters may want to help Peter in these efforts. All donations can be sent to the Sister City Project, %Treasurer Emil Haney, U.W. Richland, 1200 Hwy. 14 West, Richland Center WI 53581. If your check includes a designation for the "Medical Aid Project", the money will be earmarked for medical assistance to the residents of Chacocente.



Heading for school in Chacocente Photo by Peter Smith

PETER'S LETTER FROM CHACOCENTE

Peter Smith is the Sister City Project's permanent representative in Santa Teresa since the fall of 2000. He is currently working with several villages in the Chacocente region. His first-hand accounts and commentaries reflect both the joys and frustrations of working in the third world. This issue's report includes some encouraging local developments from Nicaragua.

MY VIEWPOINT

Several people expressed concerns about my last report in the Sister City Update. Too negative! Too focused on controversial international questions!

On the first point: I'm skeptical of organizations which habitually stress the "positive" in order to keep the donation dollars coming. In my opinion, serious supporters - by far the best type, who will see you through the hard times - want their information unvarnished. I don't always hit things exactly right, but I am dedicated to an attempt to tell it like it is.

On the second point: as far as controversial international questions are concerned, I believe that we live in a biological as well as social, economic, and political environment where everything is interconnected. We can't neatly separate certain things out and ignore them. Think globally, act locally, is my watchword.

The campesino (small farmer) communities I work with are surrounded by vast forces - tourism, agricultural conglomerates, large road building projects, international consortiums for the trans-Nicaraguan canal, to mention a few - while the campesinos often don't have the bus fare to get to the hospital, much less the money to buy the medicines they might need once there. They hear promises about a war on poverty, jobs, progress and investments. However, the reality of their lives on the land confirms the statistics published in the Nicaraguan press: public health standards are down, illiteracy is up, and the divide between the rich and poor is a wider gulf than ever.

Privatization is one of the articles of faith in the globalization process. I was recently surprised to read a headline from *Tiempos del Mundo*, a very conservative newspaper that has extolled the virtues of globalization for as long as I can remember. On their front page they stated, "Privatization (of state enterprises) has not benefited Nicaraguans," and went on to remark "...the process of privatization has increased social inequality."

Our Sister City Project is a group of citizens holding a variety of opinions. Yet as the group's representative in Nicaragua I would feel remiss if I didn't (and would consider it a stifling, counter-productive group if I couldn't) clearly express my own opinions. I don't want someone coming to me in five years saying, "Why didn't you tell us?" On the other hand, next time I'm in Wisconsin, I'd be happy to debate these issues with anyone interested.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

In the face of some bad news are we going to throw up our hands in despair? Or will we roll up our sleeves and get down to work? The fact is, we have already rolled up our sleeves and have made enough progress in our areas of endeavor to build on our past and move forward.

The Sister City Board has passed a \$13,400 budget for 2002, which is substantially above last year's effort and reflects our growing ability to raise funds and to go through the hard work of developing consensus on how to spend them. Both of these processes demand a lot of effort on everyone's part. I particularly value the consensus-making part which can make or break a citizen group with varied membership. There will be differences of opinion! I believe we deserve high marks for wending our way through these potential minefields while keeping the project on course.

Another piece of good news is the reception I received when I got back to the communities with our budget in hand. Life is hard in this desolate place in the middle of the dry season. The wind blows incessantly and hot. The sun shines bright each and every day. Dust fills every crevice. The trees lose all their leaves and shade is hard to find. But we have been working and making progress. We have a health center. We have wells, pumps, and tanks. We have a community vegetable garden. And more important than anything else, we have experience. We have met. We have counseled and made decisions. We have gathered materials to where we need them and people to get the necessary work done. With the wells and tanks in place, the idea of a tree nursery for reforestation is that much closer to reality.



The Health Center in La Palma was built with volunteer labor by Association members.

Photo by Peter Smith

Trust is another important development, trust between the gringo (me) and the campesinos, trust among the campesinos and between their communities. Trust doesn't just happen. In a poverty-driven, dog-eat-dog world, there are centrifugal forces which prevent trust from coming into being or serve to tear it down.

Many Latino communities are dominated by powerful families. (This is hardly an exclusively Latino problem.) Adopting a community consciousness committed to the good of all often feels unnatural. So it is

gratifying to see the campesino Association, which we helped form, functioning as an energizing organizational force in the communities. I truly believe that all our members in Wisconsin would be proud, even uplifted, if they could be a fly on the wall at any of our many meetings.

Here is a summary of where the local communities here seem to be heading as a result of our recent planning meetings.

WELLS

Each of the three communities we have been working with, plus La Pouma, a new community just over the ridge, has clearly stated that their crying need is more and/or improved wells. We analyzed the needs and came up with a plan for each community. I tied the importance of reforestation to any long term program to improve water and wells, and the communities all agreed wholeheartedly.

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

We have decided to stress four areas, some of which we have already started on and want to expand: poultry production, fruit production, community gardens, and medicinal plants.

In the poultry project, as well as producing eggs, we hope to have meat birds ready for the peak December market. Planting fruit trees close to existing or new wells will be our initial form of reforestation to gain experience and improve local nutrition. Later we can move into expanding the natural forest. Vegetable production is widely supported among the people, but we need to increase our experience with pest control, irrigation, and fertility to improve performance.

In the area of medicinal plants, we are blessed with the assistance of Estermilde Prudente, who has a Community Center about 12 miles south of Chacocente, where she raises all her own plants and makes a full range of medicinal preparations. She is not only going to supply us with seeds and plants, but will also help with the medicinal preparations. She is already active in training sessions with our local health promoters.

We envision dividing each community into four groups of five or six families and assigning to each group one of the four above projects. This allows for choice among projects and insures clear lines of responsibility. Yader Estrada, the Nicaraguan agronomist who has been working with me on and off for almost a year, has been helping with this effort.

TURTLE EGG TRAFFICKING

During the last four months, Yader and I have struggled to put together a reasonable comprehensive report on the illegal traffic in sea turtle eggs. The report is finally ready and has been submitted to the Mayor's office and to the Executive Secretary of COMAREN, the municipal environmental commission. Both were very supportive at a joint meeting. A decision was made to

tighten up the report and submit it to the Municipal Council for their advice on how to use it constructively.

In our report, we made the decision to name only one person, who we believe is primarily responsible for all the illegal activities. (We have the names of many more involved.) With my signature on it, we hope the document will help break the log jam of bureaucratic inertia. Responding to our report, Mayor Porfirio Cortez stated that "for our part, your report is an important tool to fill the vacuum that exists around this problem." I hope to cooperate in every way to maintain this momentum. Stay tuned!

THE PATROL BOAT FOR CHACOCENTE

We will soon have a meeting to try out the repaired boat and to finalize an agreement among the various players involved in its operation, administration, and maintenance. I am happy to report that, after many false starts, the boat will be ready for the 2002 egg laying season, backed by a solid and comprehensive agreement including representatives from the communities and the Mayor's office. They will have the right, at any time of day or night, to enter the beaches to observe and report on egg harvesting activities, legal or otherwise.

That's how it stands at Chacocente in early April 2002. Thanks for your support and interest.

Best wishes, Peter Smith



A female Leatherback heads for a nesting area on the beach at Chacocente. Photo by Sergio Pacheco

SPEAKER ON PEACE IN MIDDLE EAST

Mohammed Kharbush, a Palestinian-American from La Valle, will speak on the subject of "Finding a Lasting Peace in the Middle East" at the Brewer Library on Thursday, May 30 from 7-9 pm.

Kharbush will present a short history of Israel and Palestine and discuss the requirements for an enduring resolution of the current conflict. Questions and general discussion will follow. Admission is free.

MARROQUINS TO SPEAK ABOUT EL SALVADOR

Sister City Project member José Marroquin was visiting his native El Salvador last year when the devastating earthquake struck. After seeing the good work done in the disaster by the Salvadorian Cruz Verde (Green Cross), José and his wife Jennie were inspired to become active in collecting medical supplies for this humanitarian organization.

Jennie and José will be giving a slide show on Thursday, May 23 at 7 pm at (and sponsored by) the Brewer Library. The slides from their recent trip to El Salvador will show Salvadorean home life, schools, and the Green Cross's clinics, office, and emergency camps. A campaign here for donated medical supplies will begin May 18. There will be a box at the Library for donations.

For more information, call Jennie Marroquin at 647-7945.

In April Jennie received recognition on TV as Alliant Energy's volunteer of the month for her recent project collecting backpacks and school supplies for El Salvador. She donated her \$100 prize to her favorite U.S. non-profit organization, the Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project.

On Thursday, June 20 at 7:30 at the Brewer Library, José Marroquin will give a personal talk, "My Life in El Salvador", about his experience growing up there during the country's civil war, his involvement with the unions, encounters with the death squads in his neighborhood, and experience with the FMLN guerilla fighters. He will also discuss the current political situation in El Salvador.

BOY'S PEACE PROJECT BENEFITS SISTER CITY

Jack Whaley, a seventh grader in Spring Green's River Valley Middle School, learned about the Sister City Project at our Burrito Suppers. When his teacher asked the students to apply for the Grinnell Peace Project Award, Jack proposed placing aluminum can recycling bins decorated with pictures of Santa Teresa around his school. The money received for recycling the cans would be donated to the Sister City Project.

After Jack won the prize, Sister City Project board members Derrick and Janet Gee showed slides of Santa Teresa to an all-school assembly. The attractive recycling bins are all in place.

The Grinnell Peace Project Award is a national competition. Jack was one of only two middle school students winning this year. The Iowa Peace Institute representative making the award said how pleased she was to see recycling and international understanding combined in this way.

ARTS FESTIVAL REPORT

The 2nd Annual Arts Festival, held April 19-21, was a very fun and beautiful event. Over twenty-five artists and craftspeople displayed work and many people pitched in to arrange the works into a gallery-type show. It was a real feast for the eyes. Friday's opening night party, for which the newly formed Arts Council furnished refreshments, was well attended.

We netted \$660 for the Santa Teresa Project -- a very good effort! Hearty thank-yous to everyone who participated in making this benefit a success.

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

BENEFIT SOUP SUPPER AND DANCE

Friday, June 7
Supper 5:30-7:00, Dance 7:30

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

Homemade soups, breads, salads,
beverages, and desserts

Music by THE KETTLE CREEK BAND
Suggested Donation: \$5.00

Proceeds Buy School Supplies for Santa Teresa