

# SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 21

Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project

April 2004

## Connecting with the People of Chacocente

*Author Mary Michal has been a Sister City supporter since she learned about the project while on a WCCN sponsored trip to Nicaragua 5 years ago. She was a Peace Corps volunteer in Uruguay in 1969-70, and now practices health care law in Madison. She lives near Barneveld with her husband, Dave Haskin.*

The nine-day trip to Santa Teresa, Chacocente and the villages surrounding Chacocente in January was powerful beyond words. I am very grateful to the Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project for inviting me to be part of this delegation. Other members included Jane Furchgott, José Marroquin, Margaret and Jack Lee.

The highlight of the trip was the three days that we spent in the villages talking with the people of La Poma, La Palma, El Papalon and Escalante. After searching unsuccessfully for a ride to the villages (no one wanted to take us by taxi because we had to cross a mountain and the roads were almost impassable), our driver turned out to be José "Chepe" Martínez, former Mayor of Santa Teresa, now a "diputado" in the National Assembly.

I knew we were heading into the jungle when we stopped to watch a whole family of Howler monkeys in a tree above us. Onward, the road got ever-narrower and rougher and finally we stopped at a place where we continued our journey on foot. Leonidas, our Nicaraguan Project Coordinator, had joined us there by motorcycle. With him was Marcial, the agricultural consultant, and Ramiro, the President of the Village of La Poma. It was a congenial group and we set out, crossing small streams, hiking up, then down, then up again. It was hot, but the butterflies were beautiful.

Upon reaching La Poma, our first visit was to the "natural clinic" where two women have been trained in the use of natural medicines and have prepared a small room in which they consult people regarding their ailments. Jane, who had been suffering from a bad cough, received, after consultation, a cough syrup made by the "promotoras" of the clinic, as well as certain plant leaves and directions on how to mix and boil them to treat her symptoms.

The shelves of the clinic contained many bags of dried plants, capsules, syrups and ointments. There were treatments for fever, colds, skin diseases, kidney ailments, pain and malaria. The learning of these women is impressive. The promotoras charge a small amount for the medicines in order to buy more.

Can this small clinic be self-sustaining? That is the goal and the promotoras share that goal but they are not there yet. Margaret in particular feels drawn to assisting them with a small ongoing stipend.

After the meeting with the health promoters, we returned to Ramiro's home for almuerzo – lunch. Juanita,

Ramiro's wife, had made a big meal of chicken, rice, beans, salad, platano (fried plantain) and sweet beverages. Clearly, the family does not usually eat this well and she



*Jen, Ramiro's daughter-in-law, grinds corn for tortillas on her metate. (Photo by Mary Michal)*

used her very best dishes and a tablecloth for us. The children, Jonathan and Junior, followed us everywhere.

After lunch, we visited the school and met with representatives of the village. The children proudly showed us their one-room school. A long wooden structure with mud floor, it is nonetheless filled with visual tools for learning. The "rules of the class" included respecting each other. Fifty-five students will begin the new school year, perhaps more. There are currently five grades and the village of La Poma hopes to extend that to six and to add a second teacher. They are hopeful for their children and for their grandchildren.

The villagers streamed into the schoolhouse to meet with us, as they had been waiting for our visit, and wanted to discuss what they have done with the funds from the Sister City Project. In great detail, they told us what they have received (an exact count of medicines for the clinic, materials for construction, notebooks for the school, etc.) and what they have accomplished. We then discussed what they would like to do for the next year with the fixed funds.

This process is difficult. How do people prioritize when there is such need? Still, they are careful in their suggestions. One of the health promoters suggested that latrines are basic for the health of the village and are the highest need. If possible, it would be good to have a scale so that babies could be weighed to determine if they are thriving. Of course, it would very good to weigh adults

too, pregnant women especially, but the baby scale is needed first.

In every meeting, there is a discussion about how to best address the needs of the whole community. There is much discussion about the agriculture and gardening projects. The agriculture program, with Marcial's skill, is progressing nicely. The crops--corn, beans, sorghum, yuca--are doing well. Contour farming is being used.

The gardening project, though, is in its infancy and it was not a good year. Many of the plants died, irrigation was a problem and plants in gardens next to homes were eaten by the free ranging chickens and pigs, so some sort of fence is needed. There is talk of using old fish net, which is much less expensive than fencing. Everyone agreed, however, that growing tomatoes and peppers and squash should be continued despite the initially poor results.

In a place without electricity, or any other modern conveniences, with no latrines and wells only recently installed in a few places, one gets down to the basics. In La Poma and in the villages we visited later, that means basic health care, agriculture and gardening, education for the children.

La Poma needs a new school. We promised to try to raise the money for the materials to build it. The model is simple: bricks for the lower half of the building, chain link fence above as "windows" and ventilation. Metal roof. The land will be donated, but the title needs to be cleared and transferred. There is no money to do this. Later, the villagers will prepare a detailed budget down to every cost associated with the construction of their school. It will not exceed \$4,000 and might be a little less. Surely we can raise this money, I think. This is an investment in the future of this struggling village.

"We need to do this for our children and grandchildren," one member said. Their pride and determination, their careful preparation for our visit, were deeply moving.

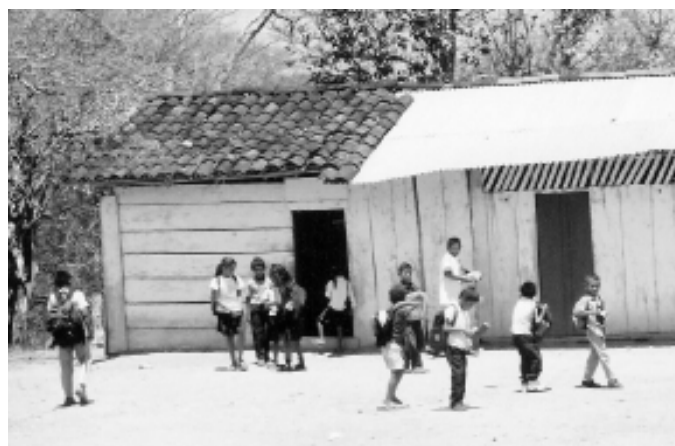
Now it is dark and we make our way back to Ramiro's home, through the woods on a rugged path, down the stream and back up again. Juanita has prepared a special supper of rice and beans and fresh cheese, yuca, eggs. It is getting late and I wonder where we will sleep. I am led to a small wooden structure adjoining the house, where a bed has been made up for me on a plastic cot. I am glad for the malaria pills as the mosquitoes are making their presence known. Maggie and Jack have a bed made for them on the other side of the wooden divider and we talk amiably as we get ready for bed. The other guests stay in the main part of the house. I am amazed that I am doing this! The night is punctuated by sounds of dogs barking, snoring and me rolling around on my cot trying to get a bit of sleep.

In the morning, I am surprised to see that one of the dogs has joined me at the foot of the bed, curled up and contented. Morning brings a trip to the latrine (newly dug for us) and the "shower" next to the pump where we all wash ourselves in the privacy of a plastic enclosure. Juanita is making us breakfast and I am once again in awe

of her skill and ingenuity in the small kitchen with mud floor, making tortillas over the fire. Breakfast is incredible: tortillas and eggs, beans, fruit juice and we have bonded with this family. There are hugs and kind words before we put on our packs and make the journey to La Palma and El Papalon.

The walks are beautiful—lush forests, small streams, butterflies. This is a snapshot of what was a remarkable trip, a deep experience of connection. The people of the region of Santa Teresa have helped me to remember that we are all interconnected. Despite the reminder how much poverty and infinite need there is in this world, despite the discomfort of privilege in the face of human suffering, I am grateful to remember and grateful for the "hermanamiento" with the beautiful people and environment of Santa Teresa and Chacocente.

## La Poma School Appeal



*La Poma children at play in front of their present school. The building is in disrepair and badly overcrowded.*

Dear Friends,

In Mid January I traveled to Nicaragua with a delegation to see how our projects were going in the communities that we are helping. Many of our projects are going well, thanks to the generosity from friends like you. There is one area where things are not going so well. It is the area of Education. The schools are falling apart. The Nicaraguan government keeps saying they are going to build new schools year after year and they never do.

We have taken it upon ourselves to help build a school in the community of La Poma. This will benefit 55 students and more children that will come in the future. We can't do this project alone and we really need your help. We are thinking to build a school by November, so it's ready in January for the new school year. So please, think about this. When we invest in Education; we never loose, since Education is the way out of poverty.

--José Marroquin



**Note:** If you wish to help with this appeal, you can do so by sending donations to the SCP and designating your gift to the La Poma School Project.

## Fiesta Week

by Jack Lee

*Jack and Margaret Lee are farmers living near LaFarge, WI. They were recently elected to the SCP board.*

We land in the dark, at Managua, find Jane, and are introduced to José Manuel, our host from Santa Teresa.

"You want to eat - no?"

"Yah, you bet."

Puzzlement. José's English is good, but not quite up to mid-western colloquialisms. So - "Si, me gusta."

At least three mariachi bands are playing at the very crowded restaurant. We find an empty table with just two chairs. There are five of us. Suddenly chairs are pushed at us from around the room. "Gracias, gracias." The waiter brings beers and asks for our dinner orders. Our neighbors' table has ten or fifteen empty beer bottles on it. Sloppy waiter? No. That's how the waiter keeps track of the bill. Soon our table is filled with empties. Dinner for five and fifteen beers - about \$40.00 US.

Sunday, 4 a.m.: Pre-dawn celebration begins with the loudest damn firecracker I've ever heard. Then a live band marching and playing from somewhere nearby. Tubas, drums, marimbas, and more. And more fire crackers. Now we're waiting for dawn and hoping Nicaraguans drink coffee. Not to worry - coffee and rolls in a generous kitchen. After breakfast, we go out to the street where we meet José Manuel. "Today we will witness the 'Parade of the Horses'."

José drives us west of Santa Teresa, where we have a good view of the parade. Hot dancing horses, nervous horses, skinny horses, sedated "I've done this before" horses, well-fed horses - all ridden by confident Nicaraguan cowboys and cowgirls. And fire crackers, under our feet and under the horses' feet. And bands of musicians playing marching tunes.

Monday, 4 a.m.: Tooth-rattling fire crackers and band music. The day begins. José is driving us to the next town, Diriamba. It's Saint Sebastian Day. Saint Sebastian is the patron saint of Diriamba and is very important to church, town, and people. Everyone tries to touch the statue of St. Sebastian as it is carried from the church on the shoulders of worshipers. We're pushed along in a confusion of colorful costumes, peacock feather crowns, and papier mache flowers. Church bells are ringing, several bands are playing, fire crackers are blasting, people are shouting and throwing confetti, balloons are being dumped from the church tower. Our ears and eyes are filled with the colors and noise of celebration.

"Come", yells José, "We'll walk with the Saint." As if we had a choice. Along the way, a street vendor complies with our request for beer [Victorias]. We walk six miles to the next town and three miles back to José's car. We get home, tumble into bed and sleep soundly. At least until 4 a.m. BOOMBA-BAM!!

Tuesday, in Chacocente, walking between villages: "Whooo, whooo, whooo!" A tribe of howler monkeys

calling from their tree-top home. Mother howlers carry their young a safe distance away, to watch us pass. The tribe leader follows us, at a distance. The rest of the tribe hoots, urging us on our way. So, we leave the home of the only Nicaraguans happy to see us go.

Thursday evening: We're met by a driver in a four-wheel-drive, five-passenger car. Eight of us jam into it, our backpacks secured to the top. It's growing dark and there are no road signs and no roads. The car is going down river banks, back up river banks and through wash-outs. I'm pretty sure by now that we'll meet a camera crew filming a TV commercial, starring our little car. And then, a road, homes, electric lights, people and other cars. It was a surreal experience.

Showers and changes of clothing make us all feel human again. "Jack" (a verbal sharp stick - can't get used to the way Spanish-speakers, unused to the hard "J", over-emphasize the sound), "You ready for a Victoria?"

"Yah, you bet." Oops, sorry. "Si, me gusta."

Victorias, supper, then bed and the soundest sleep ever.

Until 4 a.m. KABOOM BANG!! Friday's here and the celebration, "Running with the Bulls". As a crowd begins to gather in Santa Teresa square, we notice five very pretty girls getting primped by their mothers and friends. Hoo Wee! - a beauty pageant! Three bands begin to play. Fire crackers explode. The girls strut, change clothes and perform to the music of "Sexy Chick". While the pageant is taking place, we notice several men lining up wooden structures designed to look like bulls. Each wooden form bristles with fire crackers. Soon a young man picks up a "bull" and, after the fuse is lit, runs through the streets mock-attacking spectators. As this act is repeated over and over, the "bull" becomes more enraged, causing spectators to run for cover. Then, large head-cracking fire crackers explode, rocket flares shoot into the night sky, their bamboo "guiders" falling in slivers on our heads.

Like most wonderful things, it all comes to an end. It's time to go home. As the plane accelerates and lifts off Nicaragua's tarmac, I hear José Marroquin singing softly, "Goodbye, Victoria, we'll meet with you again."

"Yah, you bet."



*Consultorio Naturista--La Poma's new health clinic*

Tax-deductible contributions for all SCP undertakings may be sent to our new treasurer, Amber Raimer, at Sister City Project, P.O. Box 483, Richland Center WI 53581. Checks should be made out to the RC-Santa Teresa SCP.

## The Year In Review

by Jane Furchgott, SCP President

This past year marked a major transition for the Sister City Project (SCP). In January 2003, Peter Smith, our volunteer representative in Santa Teresa for 2 years, returned to his Hillsboro farm. Since then, we have been working directly with our new Nicaraguan representative, Leonidas Grijalva, and the SCP's newly formed Santa Teresa counterpart, the Sister City Commission. The Commission includes Leonidas, two representatives from each of four Chacocente communities, and Santa Teresa Mayor Porfirio Cortes.

While our delegation was in Chacocente in January 2004, a Commission meeting was held in the new Rio Escalante schoolhouse. Unlike the timid first meeting one year ago, the campesino members were ready to voice their opinions and argue. Women as well as men entered the debate. These are the people deciding together which projects the SCP money will fund and seeing that they are carried out.

Here is a summary of our past year's programs. (For more detailed and personal observations, see articles by Mary and Maggie elsewhere in this issue.)

### EDUCATION

- New brick and wood classroom for the La Palma/El Papalon school, built by the parents with funds from SCP and lumber donated by community member Tranquilino Selva
- Wooden desks built by a local carpenter and paid for by SCP
- Materials for teachers, such as dictionaries and atlases
- Help with school supplies for 127 kids, grades 1-6

### HEALTH

- Thirteen rope pumps provided for Chacocente wells (People are very happy with their pumps!)
- Continued training for health promoters
- One-room health clinic built in La Poma
- Regular consultation hours for health promoters, along with community visits and public health education
- Small salary awarded to health promoters by the Commission for the last half of 2003 to acknowledge their "excellent contribution to community development"
- Small revolving fund for medical emergencies established by the health promoters
- One-day clinic by local dentist, costing \$100. Many people received cleanings, fillings, and extractions.
- Two day-long clinics where a physician examined patients, taught promoters, and dispensed modern medicines brought from Wisconsin

### AGRICULTURE

- Very successful program, praised by local farmers
- Good rainy season leading to a big harvest
- 35 farmers participating, 31 completing their contract

- Contour plowing & planting, organic fertilizers, natural insecticides, green manures, soil erosion barriers, seed selection, and fruit tree grafting taught by agronomist Marcial Chavarria
- Metal drum silos provided by SCP for community seed storage
- Orchards of mango, papaya, orange, lemon, and cashew trees planted by families near their wells.

### GARDENS

- Our least successful program for 2003
- The instructor was fired early on because he was working two other jobs and not giving enough time to Chacocente
- Home gardens (chosen instead of last year's community gardens) were often damaged by domestic animals
- Seeds and seedlings washed out by heavy rains
- Decision by the Commission not to fund gardens in 2004 even though some gardens were successful

Nicaragua is a difficult country to work in. Poverty, corruption, crime and environmental degradation, are realities that must be dealt with. A government strapped by external debt has even less money for basic services.

But in spite of this context, I think our people-to-people project is really helping Chacocente. Local residents keep telling us that they hear lots of promises from their government and other private organizations, but our Sister City Project is the only one that does what it promises and continues to help.

Thank you to all contributors and supporters who have made these successful projects possible!



*La Poma promotora Martha concentrates on a diagnosis and herbal perscription for Jane F, who was suffering from a bad cough*

## To Sister City Richland Center

### My Visit to Sister City Santa Teresa

By Maggie Lee

I wish I could share the faces of these country people with you. They are a beautiful, quiet people -- but strong. The city people of Santa Teresa were friendly and hospitable. They opened their homes, fed us well, and made us feel welcome. The people of the countryside opened not only their homes but their hearts. Their gratitude to Richland Center, their Sister City, was so apparent. The children followed us, smiling shyly when we looked their way. Every time we reached a home we were given drink and refreshment. The meals they fed us were banquets, once even served on blue glass dishes. This was in a tiny home with packed earth floors. The table was set up in the yard. Where they could keep the dishes in this tiny house, home to at least seven people, I don't know. The banquet was prepared on a wood fire in a small kitchen with no windows. Remember it's close to 90 degrees! Tortillas made from scratch means beginning with grinding the corn.



*CP representative Leonidas Grijalva presents a blood pressure cuff to Escalante promotora Liduvina Traña. A cuff was donated for each of the 4 communities by Bruce Kaasay, pharmacist at Synder Drug in Richland Center*

The wells paid for by their Sister City have to be one of the most valuable additions to the communities. We visitors realized their value after hiking all day in 90 degree heat. The shower in the plastic stall, made just for us, was the best I've had in my life! Cool clean water dumped from buckets over our bodies revived us like nothing else could. It certainly gave a perspective to what clean available water must mean to these families. All the families looked fresh and clean dressed in their best clothes to greet us. I'm sure the wells play an important part in this.

Jane asked me to write about the clinics and the health promoters who run them. These women have stolen my heart! They are strong intelligent women. Working with a small amount of money from their Sister City, they have developed clinics to serve their

communities. They grow and gather native plants to produce the salves, ointments, and soaps used in their natural healing methods. They also apply a diagnostic process that includes kinesiology (muscle testing).

Their clinics consist of a cot and shelves to store their supplies. Two clinics have new, cement-floored buildings, one of which is a room added to the back of a home. The third is in a room divided off from a larger shed using plastic curtains. The floor is packed earth. All are small, but very clean and well cared for.

These women go to the local SCP commission meeting with their needs for the clinics. They speak out with a strong voice, asking for more training, materials, and equipment; but they must compete with school, sanitation, and agricultural projects. The goal is for the clinics to become self-sustainable, but a few years is a very short time to accomplish this. They have worked so hard. To encourage these women in their venture, I've pledged \$10 per woman per month for the next year. My affection for the people and the area kept my head working many a night. Some other ideas...

In the villages, children are educated at most to sixth grade. To continue their education they must go to a larger town such as Santa Teresa. I heard \$300 per year mentioned as the cost of sending a student to school in Santa Teresa. Could we establish a scholarship fund for this? Then a further scholarship fund for attending college? In Nicaragua, or perhaps at the UW-Richland campus in their Sister City?

Some of the eye and other health problems may be helped by better nutrition. My old Headstart work showed me that the best way to reach the parent is through the child. Maybe we could send home simple work sheets showing foods that supply needed vitamins might be helpful. Students taking Spanish in our local schools could help develop these.

On our hike through the countryside, I saw butterflies of all sizes and colors, large and small, pure white, blue--one was green the color of a new leaf, and when it landed and folded its wings the veins made it look just like a twig. There were tiny lavender ones, pinks, oranges. It was amazing! I kept being sidetracked by them and by the songs of the birds. My head kept saying: Eco-tourism might work, bringing income with little harm to the area. There are the howler monkeys, the huge trees, the brilliant flora. Could we begin to consider this as a stepping-stone towards well-being for the area? Whatever we do is small for us, but gives these wonderful people the ability to do so much for their communities.

So many ideas -- so much that can be done!

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Thanks to those who contributed to this issue:

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## “Meet your Sister!”

This slide presentation is aimed at introducing our Sister City Project to people in the Richland Center area who may not have heard about the exciting things that we do. For those of you who are already familiar with our work, this is a great chance to bring along friends and family members so that they, too, can "meet their sister"

**Date: Thursday, April 15**

**Time: 7pm**

**Place: Pippin Hall, Richland Hospital**  
(Look for directions in the Hospital lobby)

See you there!

**Change Service Requested**

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## The Sea Turtle Situation

by Jane Furchgott

Chacocente's sea turtles continue to be endangered.

The new head of the Chacocente MARENA station, Jorge Luis Carcache, seems like an honest, intelligent, and concerned young man. The situation he is dealing with is complex and difficult. During the past egg-laying season, the turtle protection boat, "Hermanad Wisconsin," was used to patrol Chacocente waters from August through October. These patrols, paid for by the SCP in 2003, prevent fishing nets from being set in the Refuge's waters.

Unfortunately, even with the patrol boat, adult turtle killing at sea seems to be increasing. A handful of fishermen from nearby El Astillero intentionally catch and cut open female turtles to get their eggs. According to Jorge Carcache, because they know where the turtles congregate before coming ashore, these fishermen can go out at night to kill the turtles, aware that the patrol boat can only be used in the daytime.

MARENA plans to have a small station with a couple of guards at El Astillero this coming season in an effort to stop the killing. Local police will be included in the effort, as MARENA and the army guards aren't allowed to arrest and detain people.

The police will also be included in the boat patrol crew. Mayor Cortes has promised us that during the next two years all costs of the boat patrol will be paid by another funding organization.

Because of the region's poverty, many people depend on income from legally or illegally obtained turtle eggs. While law enforcement may help reduce the killing of turtles and theft of eggs, the long-term solution is

improved economic opportunities for the people of Chacocente and El Astillero.

On a hopeful note, Jorge Carcache reports that about 35,000 olive ridley turtles laid their eggs at Chacocente

during the 2003 season, compared to 26,000 in 2002. The number has been tending downwards but varies from year to year. He said more baby turtles successfully hatched in 2003.

At the northern end of Chacocente's beach, the leatherback hatchery run by Fauna & Flora has 80 nests this season, a great increase over last season's 22 nests. Chacocente's small nesting colony is important because leatherbacks are critically endangered in the Pacific Ocean.

## Outhouses & Sewing Machines

Chacocente residents of La Poma and El Papalon are already digging holes for their new latrines. For years, the Santa Teresa mayors have promised latrines but have not come through with them. Now the Sister City Project is funding materials for latrine construction in these two communities.

In Escalante and La Palma, a cooperative sewing project has begun. The SCP has purchased two treadle sewing machines for each community and women are being trained in how to use them.

## April 12 Presentation in Madison

Derrick and Janet Gee, Mary Michal, and Jane Furchgott will present "The Chacocente Programs", a Slide Show and Talk about the SCP, on Monday, April 12, at 7:00 pm. The location is the Village Cohousing

Community at 1104A Mound St. in Madison For more information or directions, call Jane at 608 583-2431

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Also on April 12, Jane Furchgott and Maggie Lee will be interviewed by Ron Fruit on the WRCO Morning Show at 9:00 am. If you're in the Richland Center listening area, tune in at 1450 AM or 100.9 FM