

# SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 39

Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project

April 2013

## Experiencing the *Arribada*

by Stein Goering

When Jane Furchgott, Linda Stadler and I made plans for our visit to Santa Teresa last fall, I didn't expect that we'd consider the phase of the moon when setting our travel dates. However, it was a very relevant factor, given that our likely itinerary included a stop at the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge beach. That stretch of Pacific Ocean coastline includes a nesting area for olive ridley sea turtles. The *arribada* events in late summer and fall, when female turtles return en masse to the beach where they were hatched to lay their eggs, are most likely to occur during the quarter moon.

When we arrived at the Chacocente MARENA (Nicaragua's DNR) station on December 7, the rangers said that there had not really been much sign of turtle activity, but they would be monitoring the nesting area that night and offered to take us down after dark. So at around 9:30, the three of us were escorted down to the beach by Faustino, a MARENA biologist.

We would have been happy just to see a turtle or two, but soon after we reached the shore we realized that there were a lot more. In fact, we were witness to a full-fledged *arribada*. We saw many turtles emerge from the ocean and drag themselves across the sand some distance from the water. Herman, one of the guards, used his flashlight to give us a close-up view of one as she excavated a hole

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Jane Furchgott

A sea turtle digging her nest hole. The washable white paint mark was applied by a guard counting turtles during the *arribada*.



Alma Susana Chávez

A student waters tomato seedlings in the La Poma school garden.

## School Gardens are Important!

by Jane Furchgott

While I was in Santa Teresa, I met with the teachers of the Chacocente elementary schools. Knowing that it meant extra work for all of them, I asked for their evaluation of the school garden program. Without exception, the teachers said it was very important, an excellent program which should continue. The primary value they saw was in the food produced. Many students come to school without a meal, but they can eat well at noon. Also, the teachers saw that the children were very interested, and were learning hands-on procedures for growing vegetables organically.

Sister City Project (SCP) coordinator Alma Susana Chávez found two recent graduates of the Rivas agricultural college, Manuel Solís and Rodolfo Narvaez, to help with the school gardens and our other agricultural projects. These two young *tecnicos* worked very hard, coming to Chacocente daily, helping students prepare the soil, start vegetable seedlings, make compost, plant trees, and keep the pests under control.

Despite heavy rains early in the season, and drought conditions later on, the gardens were successful. Children, parents, teachers, and secondary scholarship students all pitched in to help.

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Stein Goering

MARENA tecnico Faustino Obando shows us the station's ledger which lists each purchase of guards' equipment made with SCP-donated funds.

patrol boat being used by MARENA. The fishermen's co-op in El Astillero, near the refuge, kicked out the fishermen from further north who were using explosives near Chacocente, not letting them spend the night at Astillero. The Astillero fishermen are not doing blast fishing.

The FFI (Fauna and Flora International) leatherback sea turtle hatchery, which SCP helps fund, had only two successful leatherback nests this past season, an all time low. The Pacific leatherback is in grave danger of extinction, so the hatchery is still very important.

Fresh water remains a big problem at the Chacocente MARENA station. While we were there, Jeffer had to use his truck to haul a huge metal tank of water from a distant well, and a smaller amount from elsewhere for drinking water. Last year they got funds to drill a deep well, but the water was too salty, unusable. Park ranger Manuel, who has worked at the station for many years, said he tasted the water when the well had reached 15 meters, and it was good, but then they drilled deeper into salty water. SCP is funding an exploratory hand-dug well attempt by the local people. Will they find a mantle of fresh water so close to the ocean? Stay tuned and find out in our next newsletter. 🌱

*We just got word that we will receive funding for Alma Susana's community dream project, a day for all the Chacocente school children to visit the nesting beach and actually get to know the baby sea turtles. We thank the California-based Raechel and Jackie Foundation for awarding us this grant!*

### School Gardens, continued

In December, Manuel Solís showed us some of the school gardens, now finished for the season, and the young fruit trees which would be watered by community volunteers during vacation. The La Poma school garden contained small mango, lime, guava, starfruit, cashew, and Spanish lime trees. Manuel said this garden plot had been plowed by oxen. It had been watered with watering cans.



Alma Susana Chávez

Tecnico Manuel Solís leads garden compost making — the ingredients being mixed on the school's cement floor.

SCP board members have not visited in the months when the gardens are at their height, but Alma's photos show beautiful produce: peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers — the whole La Chota schoolyard covered with squash and melon vines. The program will continue through this school year. 🌱



Alma Susana Chávez

Girls checking trellised cucumber plants in the El Terrero school garden.



Stein Goering

*The beginning of the arribada at Chacocente*

*Experiencing the Arribada, continued*

with her back flippers and laid a clutch of over 80 eggs (I lost count at some point). Then she covered the hole and tamped the sand using her whole body before she returned to the sea. Faustino also showed us a group of hatchlings, just emerged from eggs laid during a previous *arribada*.

When Jane and I returned to the beach at dawn, we found it completely covered with turtle-sized trails left overnight. With the daylight, we could see turtles in various phases of the nesting process all along the beach. The MARENA crew, who'd been out there all night, were continuing to monitor and record the activity. The dawn also brought flocks of black vultures, on hand in case the turtles digging new nests happened to kick up eggs from the last *arribada*.

Afterward, MARENA director Jeffer Cruz told us that they had recorded over 1,700 nests during that first night of the three-day event. He noted with satisfaction that the *arribada* was “on the dot, *el cuarto menguante*, the waning quarter.” 🌿



Stein Goering

*Jane Furchgott watches an olive ridley sea turtle return to the ocean.*

## Turtle Protection at Chacocente

by Jane Furchgott

Stein, Linda, and I spent time with Jeffer Cruz, Chacocente MARENA director, riding around in his MARENA pickup, always parked facing downhill so it could be started by pushing. Jeffer, the best director we have seen in our 15 years at Chacocente, makes admirable use of very limited funding. Last year SCP had sent a letter to Nicaraguan government authorities at a crucial moment, expressing our support for Jeffer and praising his work. He thanked us for this and for our help in a crisis last fall, funding emergency food for the guards during the *arribadas*. Jeffer said his current guarding group is well disciplined and honest; they didn't throw the towel despite the lack of food.



Stein Goering

*Chacocente MARENA director Jeffer Cruz, with his 11-year old son, Jeffer, and SCP President Linda Stadler*

This *arribada* season, now ending, surpassed last year's record of nests, with a total of 71,770, but hatched a slightly lower 944,000 baby turtles. Many young turtles were laying eggs in the large *arribadas* last fall. A guard showed me how to tell the age of a nesting turtle by feeling: the edges of the shell of a young turtle will be sharp. An old turtle's shell will have flat edges — she will have worn them down over the years through the active rocking movements used to pack down the sand when covering her eggs.

Jeffer and Faustino Obando, MARENA biologist/tecnico, are proud of their more accurate methods of monitoring — counting the turtles and hatchlings. Faustino has presented the methods and data at biological meetings. Ariel Arteaga, a young man from the Chacocente community of Escalante, is now the MARENA education person at the station.

Jeffer told us that this season less than 1% of the eggs had been lost to poachers. There has been less slaughter of turtles in the Chacocente waters, although there is no



Jane Furchgott

Scholarship recipient Neyling Guevara receives a certificate for successful completion of her school year from SCP treasurer Stein Goering.

## Scholarship Program Growing

by Marilyn Rinehart

The Sister City Scholarship Program, now in its third year, continues to grow thanks to the commitments of more than 15 sponsors. This year our funds will help to support eleven new secondary school students, along with all nine of our continuing scholarship recipients. Three of the continuing students are receiving support for the third year in a row.

Our students come from five small one-room schools in the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge and buffer zone where, in the past, many children never considered education beyond the sixth grade level. Our support, given in monthly installments, helps to cover the cost of transportation, lunch money, or incidentals as each family sees fit. Our coordinator, Alma Susana Chávez, makes sure that the students are completing the community service requirements and achieving the academic standard.

In 2012 we monitored the progress of our scholarship recipients to assure that they were achieving at 80% or better in all subject areas which include mathematics, science, history, literature, introductory English, civics, art, vocational-technical, and physical education. Scores from these classes are averaged to give a final grade. 70% is required to advance to the next level, although we require that students achieve 80% by the final grading period. If they fall below that level during a school year, they continue on probation. All the students met the final scholarship requirements and chose to continue in the 2013 school year.

The secondary school includes the age group that would be going to middle school and high school in the United States. A typical day for a secondary student begins, no doubt, with a quiet walk to their family latrine and a splash of cold water from the wash area around their covered well. Breakfast would be last night's rice and beans with perhaps an egg, compliments of the chickens who wander around the plastic chairs in their yard. Many of the students have to walk up to a mile or so, across the shallow areas of the Rio Escalante to the fork in the road near La Chota. Here they will climb onto an already crowded open bus to ride the bumpy dirt road to the school at La Pitilla. After school most students will walk the whole long distance home.

The school year begins during the very hot, dry period in February and continues through November. May through November is the rainy season, when students may have difficulty at river crossings or on the muddy roads. Most of the homes have no electricity, although some are starting to use small solar panels that give them a few hours of electricity each day – enough to charge a cell phone, read for a while in the evening, or even watch a television broadcast from Managua.

Our goals in beginning this scholarship program were to encourage students to reach for a better future for themselves and their communities. Some of our students who hold this goal will be able to continue in higher education, in health care, education, agriculture, or business. We look forward to the day when others will return to the villages and assume more responsibility as community leaders, health promoters, farmers, and parents.

If you have any questions or if you would like to know more about this Sister City Project, please feel free to

contact me, Marilyn Rinehart, at [mrinehart@dishmail.net](mailto:mrinehart@dishmail.net) or (608) 347-5473, or one of the other scholarship committee members, Janet Gee and Linda Stadler. 🌱



Jane Furchgott

Scholarship student Karen Castillo from La Chota is doing very well in her first year at the La Pitilla secondary school.

## 2012 Project Summary

- **Water Projects.** SCP funded eight well rope pumps, 15 water filters for home and school use, and materials for 11 community-built wells, ten well lids, and 22 latrines — also the extension of water-by-gravity piping for 14 families in La Poma, La Chota, and El Papalón.



Alma Susana Chávez

Digging a latrine pit in the dry season. Construction projects are done in the rainless months from January through April, when the ground can be rock-hard.

- **Medical.** Community visits were made by the rural doctor and nurse. Basic medicines were provided for the rural La Pita clinic. Medical supplies were brought from Wisconsin. Eight training sessions were held for community health promoters. (topics included: transporting a patient in childbirth, the moment of childbirth, vaccinations, and dengue.)



Jane Furchgott

Dr. Eduardo López thanks Linda Stadler for bringing medical supplies and equipment donated by the Richland Hospital. This new doctor, originally from rural Santa Teresa, staffs the La Pita clinic, visits the communities, and trains the village health promoters.



Alma Susana Chávez

Her new outhouse! SCP funded construction of 22 latrines this past year.

- **School Supplies** were provided for 203 elementary and pre-school students and their teachers in five Chacocente schools, plus extra food to supplement the government lunch program.
  - **Secondary School Scholarships.** Nine scholarships were awarded, enabling Chacocente young people to attend secondary school in 2012.
  - **School Gardens** were planted in each of the five schools. Led by SCP ag technicians, students participated in gardening and compost making. They grew vegetables for school lunches, and planted trees for fruit and shade.
  - **Farmer-to Farmer Program.** 40 farmers, working in pairs to help and learn from each other, received ag technicians' on-site advice, some fertilizer, and training in ecological fertilizers and prevention of soil erosion.
  - **Environment.** Support for the leatherback sea turtle hatchery, equipment for the sea turtle monitoring program and guards at the *arribada* beach, emergency food for the guards, environmental education workshops in Chacocente schools, two nesting beach clean-ups.
- Vice-president José Marroquin visited Santa Teresa in April; Jane Furchgott, treasurer Stein Goering, and president Linda Stadler visited in December, all at their own expense. 🌿

*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.*

# El Tamagás and El Eslabón

by Derrick Gee

After 26 years of working with the municipality of Santa Teresa and 13 years with communities in and around the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge, SCP has developed not only a close relationship with those communities, but also a grassroots view of the needs of both the environment and of the people living in and around this special ecosystem.

As a result, SCP has been able to design and test a model for reducing the inequality of opportunity for people in those communities and, at the same time, lessening their negative impact on the environment. Expansion into more of the communities in need is being launched. After reviewing the candidates, our on-the-ground coordinator, Alma Susana Chávez, and our board have selected the new location and work has begun.

Funding is coming from a new concept, the “Village Partners” program. A group of five families who live in the Spring Green, Wisconsin area have committed to partner with the village by providing \$5,000 per year for three years to buy materials and to pay for Alma Susana and her team to coordinate the work. The villagers’ contribution to the partnership will be to supply all the labor for the improvement projects. This will ensure community participation, sustainability and will also give dignity to the effort.

To kick the ball into play, SCP board member Sally Dahir checked out the new village in January and helped Alma and the villagers to prepare a budget for the first year, which includes water projects, latrines, and school supplies. As the work in this community progresses, the Spring Green Village Partners will receive regular reports and thus develop a clearer understanding of the issues facing people in less-developed parts of the world. At



Sally Dahir

some point, the Partners, including their children, will have an opportunity to visit “their village” and to make new friends.

SCP hopes to enable more such partnerships in the future and would welcome your enquiries to board member Derrick Gee at [curanto99@hotmail.com](mailto:curanto99@hotmail.com). 🌿



Sally Dahir

*The first meeting with the El Eslabón / El Tamagás community, at their schoolhouse*

## Visiting the New Community

by Sally Dahir

I had the unique opportunity to visit the Sister City Santa Teresa Project this January not only to see the incredible work that has been done so far but also to “scope out” a new community in which to work. El Tamagás / El Eslabón are twin villages which together have a total of 55 families in 35 houses. They share a new primary school with 61 students.

I was surprised to see so many people waiting at the school to meet Alma and me. They seemed very eager to have our help. The most important thing they need right now is water, since there are few wells and most of them are dry. It hardly rained at all this past rainy season. There is a well located on a high point that has water, and a gasoline-powered pump, but the pump is broken. Fixing this pump will allow water to be pumped into a tank whose water can be gravity fed to several houses. This should be a priority.

They have many other needs, but overall the people of El Tamagás / El Eslabón are eager to work. This will be a great opportunity for me to see how a project evolves from the beginning and I am certain to come back. 🌿

*Newsletter Production: Jane Furchgott and Sue Furchgott, with help from Marilyn Rinehart*



Alma Susana Chávez

Chacocente's Nicaraguan Independence Day celebration includes a Wisconsin flag that once flew over our state capitol, given to the La Poma school in 2005 by Senator Dale Schultz.

Everyone is welcome to come 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.

Our SCP website is [santa-teresa.wccnica.org](http://santa-teresa.wccnica.org) – check it out and see the newsletter photos in full color. Past newsletters are all available to read online, along with announcements of upcoming events. If you'd like to receive the electronic Sister City Update, email us at [santa-teresa@wccnica.org](mailto:santa-teresa@wccnica.org). Visit us on Facebook! (Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project).



Jane Furchgott

SCP coordinator Alma Susana Chávez, here working on financial reports at home in her patio, is responsible for managing all our projects in Nicaragua.

## SCP Junta Directiva: Featuring our Board members

Our SCP Board of Directors doesn'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. Thank you to everyone who donates and makes our work possible!! Here are two of our eleven board members:

### Stein Goering

Stein has been part of the Sister City Project since it began in 1987, and has been our treasurer for the past ten years. He is from a Kansas Mennonite family background. Stein and his wife Barbara Duerksen have lived on their farm in Richland County's Marshall Township for 40 years, and have a son studying in England. Stein used to operate a goat dairy, was the UW Richland computer technician, and now works out of his home as a software developer for ACEware Systems, also raising beef cattle. (Photo of Stein on page 4.)



Sally with her husband, retired orthopedic surgeon Dr. Steven Stoddard, who volunteered teaching in a Managua hospital while Sally was in Santa Teresa.

### Sally Dahir

Our newest board member, Sally grew up in a socialist freethinker family on a Prairie du Sac farm. She worked in El Salvador with the Peace Corps in 1977-9, and earned six college degrees in such subjects as art history, physician's assistant, and forestry. She has two children. Sally loves travel, ecotourism and relating to people in third world countries. She works for the Wisconsin DNR as a forest inventory data analyst, and at home restoring healthy oak woods and savannah.

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## KICKAPOO SPRING FLING! ☀️ Food, Fun & Music ☀️ Sat. April 27

The Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project and the Friends of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve invite you to celebrate the season with our annual “**Brats, Burgers & Beer**” Spring Fling! The event will be held on **Saturday, April 27** at the **Kickapoo Valley Reserve**, S3661 State Hwy. 131, north of La Farge, Wisconsin.

### Spring Fling Schedule \$10 includes meal and programs:

- 3:00 Geology and History Walk
- 4:00 Nature Walk
- 4-6:30 Grilled Brats and Burgers, salads, Nicaraguan gallo pinto, homemade desserts, soft drinks
- 4-5:30 Craft Demonstrations, also Hula Hoops
- 5:30 Sister City Presentation
- 6:30 Raffle and Silent Auction results
- 7:00 Music with Dan Sebranek and Mary

Also, there will be a \$10 Raffle (first prize \$1,300 canoe, plus binoculars, Nicaraguan hammock); a Silent Auction; and the famous “Brew Canoe.”

The Spring Fling proceeds will be split equally between the Kickapoo Reserve’s education program and the Sister City Project’s education programs in Nicaragua’s Chacocente Wildlife Refuge.

For information contact the Reserve at (608) 625-2960, [kickapoo.reserve@krm.state.wi.us](mailto:kickapoo.reserve@krm.state.wi.us) or visit <http://kvr.state.wi.us>



Alma Susana Chávez

Twins in the sixth grade at the El Papalón school. SCP provides school supplies for five elementary schools, and now awards scholarships to help students continue on to secondary school.