

SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 41

Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project

April 2014



Sally Dahir

SCP President Linda Stadler and Marilyn Rinehart with all 19 of the 2013 secondary scholarship students

Milestones Reached in Scholarship Program

by Marilyn Rinehart

The Secondary School Scholarship was first offered in 2010 to graduates of five elementary schools in the Chacocente region. Three students were accepted then, two of whom have now completed their secondary studies and plan to continue their education. On our visits we have watched them grow over these three years and we congratulate Walter Jiménez and Marili Bravo on this important step in their lives!

Their graduation is just one part of the program's overall success. In each community, parents participated in the decision to expand the offer to more students. They told us they would rather see more students continue to secondary school, even if it meant a smaller stipend for each student. With that directive, we accepted nine students in 2012 and 19 in 2013. In 2014, 15 continuing students and seven new students have applied and met the qualifications. We will be able to award \$250 per student over this school year in quarterly installments as they achieve a grade average of 80% or more. We are proud to be meeting our goal of increasing the numbers of students seeking education beyond the sixth grade.

There are other unexpected benefits. When we met with secondary school teachers in December, they told us that our students are stimulating the other students to

work harder. Also, our students have a requirement for community service. We see them accepting their roles and responsibilities as young adults in their communities.

Our promise to more students means that our financial contribution has grown from around \$1000 in 2011 to \$5500 in 2014. Several donors have committed to giving \$250 or \$500 per year for five years, each supporting the total secondary education of one or two students. The remainder comes from annual contributions. Please consider being a five-year sponsor. For more information go to our website, or email SCPscholar@gmail.com. 🌱

New SCP Website

Please check out the updated Sister City Project website at <http://santa-teresa.wccnca.org>. SCP Board member Sally Dahir has redesigned it, with a new look and a more user-friendly interface. We've added more information and photos of our projects, and it still has all our past newsletters, along with announcements of upcoming events. Thanks to WCCN for website hosting and to Sheldon Rampton for technical assistance. If you'd like to receive the full-color electronic Sister City Update, email us at santa-teresa@wccn.org.

Community Meetings Key to SCP Success

by Marilyn Rinehart

Imagine everyone in your community – men, women, and children – sitting respectfully through a two-hour meeting to discuss the budget for next year. This is what I observed in the six communities that are now a part of our work in Santa Teresa.

Marilyn Rinehart



SCP coordinator Alma Susana Chávez leads a community meeting at the El Terrero school, 2013.

Most often we arrive at the small school building to find a few people already gathering in one of the two classrooms on tiny preschool chairs, molded plastic chairs, or even homemade wooden chair-desks. Some of the buildings show the recent improvements like new wire mesh windows or a coat of bright blue paint.

Campeños in their jeans, cotton shirts, and high rubber boots find their places in the center, while mothers in cotton skirts, knit t-shirts, and flip-flops settle with their infants or toddlers comfortably lolling in their laps. A couple of teenage boys with buzz-cuts and unknown US logos on their t-shirts might hang out over the window sill, not

Jane Furchgott



Women listening at an Escalante meeting, 2009.

coming closer but obviously interested. School age children, all neatly dressed, quietly come and go, playing with their friends outside or leaning against the knees of their mothers, fathers, or grandfathers.

Alma Susana, our coordinator, introduces us. Linda, our president, offers greetings from Wisconsin, and explains our purpose – to make sure that the work we planned for the past year has been completed and to begin the process of determining their needs for the coming year. Each time she makes it clear that what we hear today will go back to our SCP (Sister City Project) Board. No promises are made until we know what money we will have available at the time of our January budget meeting. Alma begins the check-offs of wells, latrines, pumps, and agriculture. Linda asks about scholarships, school packets, school gardens, and doctor visits. Men are most likely to begin the responses, but the young women, smiling shyly, chime in when gardens and healthcare come up. (They really want a doctor who is more friendly!) The grandmothers, in their best dresses with beautiful scarves, have sat stoically to this point, but now offer their comments. Their smiles reveal missing or silver-capped teeth. Linda has brought some photos and a copy of our fall newsletter to send around the room. As these pass slowly through the group, children find themselves in the photos of the field trip to the beach, a high point of the school year.



Jane Furchgott

A farmer makes a point at a La Chota village meeting, 2011.

Sometimes problems come to the surface – a woman complains that her latrine hasn't been completed because the materials are still sitting at a neighbor's place. Alma, Linda, and the community leader spend a long time sorting through the issues. Sometimes problems come out later in individual conversations – a couple of people felt like they were the only ones working in the school garden.

At some point the community leader or another spokesman makes what seems to be a prepared speech about the importance of the work we do in their communities, while a skinny dog or a chicken gets shooed away from the door. A baby snuggles in and begins nursing, a father puts his arm around his son's shoulder when he comes in from playing. A breeze blows across the room, the upper half of the wall open or with wire mesh, while the exchanges continue.

It is a privilege to observe this process first hand. SCP supporters can be certain that this work reaches people who are involved in the planning and are truly appreciative of its positive effect on their daily lives. 🌿



Stein Goering

El Terrero health promoter Arely Prado and daughters at a community meeting, 2012

Donations to support the work of the Sister City Project are always gratefully accepted. Send to: Sister City Project, PO Box 483, Richland Center, WI 53581 (or you can donate online at our website).

2013 Project Summary

- **School Supplies** – were provided for 195 elementary and pre-school students in five Chacocente schools, plus food to supplement the government lunch program. Each school received a storage cabinet.
- **Secondary School Scholarships** – 19 scholarships were awarded, enabling Chacocente young people to attend secondary school in 2013.
- **School Gardens** – were planted in each of the five schoolyards. Students participated in growing vegetables for school lunches and planting trees for fruit and shade.
- **Water Projects** – In the Chacocente villages, SCP funded 13 well rope pumps, 26 water filters, and materials for five community-built wells, 16 well



Marilyn Rinehart

At the La Pita clinic, nurse Nevil Solís prepares an insulin shot.

lids, and 22 latrines -- also the extension of water-by-gravity piping for ten families

- **Medical** – The rural doctor and nurse made community visits. Basic medicines were provided for the La Pita clinic. Medical supplies were brought from Wisconsin. Nine training sessions were held for community health promoters.
- **Agriculture** – 69 metal grain storage silos were provided, on a cost-share basis, to Chacocente farmers.
- **Environment** – Support for the leatherback sea turtle hatchery, equipment for Chacocente's turtle rangers, 17 environmental workshops in the schools, and the visit of 200 Chacocente schoolchildren to the sea turtle beach.
- **Alcaldia project** – 20 permanent metal trash cans were mounted around the city of Santa Teresa.
- **Partner Villages** – Projects were begun in Eslabón-Tamagás, the Spring Green Village Partners focus community. Five wells, seven rope pumps and well lids, ten latrines, and ten water filters were provided, as well as school supplies for 63 students. 🌿



Alma Susana Chávez

Ready to take home their new grain storage silos, constructed by a pair of metalworkers at a central site in each community

La Pita, Partner Village #2

by Sally Dahir

La Pita is the second village in the recently initiated SCP Village Partners program, where a committed group of donors funds basic projects for three years in one specific new Santa Teresa village. Arriving at La Pita, we Board members found at least 50 people gathered at the school for the initial meeting. We met the two village leaders, Mayra Saborio and Rosadimos Cortéz, and together with all of the villagers decided which families most needed a new well during the coming year. They decided where to place six wells to serve the greatest number of families.

After the meeting, we visited the homes of the future well and latrine recipients. Previous wells have traditionally been located near the streambeds where the water is closer to the surface. Heavy downpours during the rainy season can undermine the edge of the streambed, causing the earth to shift and cracking the well casing. This lets in dirt and makes the water unusable.

We saw the La Pita public health clinic, staffed by the doctor and nurse who attend patients from the Chacocente area. The clinic has a refrigerator for vaccines (run by a single solar panel) and a shelf full of medicines. The nurse showed us their excellent records, keeping track of children who receive vaccines.

We revisited the first Partner Village, Eslabón-Tamagás, to check on their progress, and were fascinated to see the beautiful new wells and latrines. They had been without water after two dry years and now were rejoicing in their new functioning wells. Everyone expressed gratitude to the SCP for providing something so necessary. 🌿



Marilyn Rinehart

SCP Board member Sally Dahir, one of the donors in the La Pita Village Partners group, speaks with village leader doña Mayra Saborio by the La Pita clinic.



José Gabriel Martínez Fonseca

A baby Black turtle, born at the Veracruz hatchery, heads for the ocean. This species nests in small numbers at Chacocente.

The Chacocente Sea Turtle Season

by Jane Furchgott

Chacocente MARENA Director Jeffer Cruz was positive about progress at the sea turtle beach when he met with our visiting Board members in December. The Nicaraguan army had provided five more soldiers for protection in the nesting season, bringing the total up to 13 in the detachment, its captain himself being interested in environmental issues. After a slow start last summer, the nesting season continued well, with 54,000 olive ridley sea turtle nests at the arribada beach, and over a million olive ridley sea turtle hatchlings emerging from the sand.

SCP continues to help support Fauna and Flora International's (FFI) leatherback sea turtle hatchery at Veracruz, on the north end of the Refuge's coastline. Although there were only four leatherback nests this season, two new mother leatherbacks nested for the first time, an encouraging sign for the continuance of this critically endangered species.

SCP coordinator Alma Susana Chávez collaborated with MARENA (Nicaragua's DNR) and FFI to give Chacocente school children environmental workshops, this year culminating in an arribada beach visit. Both Jeffer and the Chacocente villagers were very pleased with the October Children's Visit to the MARENA station and beach, the event's t-shirts still being very much in evidence everywhere. Alma also organized two nesting beach clean-ups, one of the community service activities done by our secondary scholarship students.

As you read this newsletter, Alma Susana and I expect to be attending the 2014 International Sea Turtle Symposium, giving presentations on Alma's and the SCP's 15 years of work for turtle conservation at Chacocente. 🌿

The New Santa Teresa Clinic is Open!

by Linda Stadler

The new public health clinic recently built in Santa Teresa was a highlight of our December trip to Nicaragua. The facility, located on the edge of town, is very spacious. The old clinic in the center of town had some dirt floors, poor lighting, and was very crowded, with motorcycles parked right inside the entryway. The entrance to the new facility was bright and spotless, and the staff members were noticeably proud of their new building. They have waiting rooms, laboratory space, exam and treatment rooms, a physical therapy room, a dentist office, a procedure room, a storage room for medical supplies, and some office space. The courtyard in the center provides sunlight and will eventually be filled with plants and flowers.

Unfortunately the new clinic building is essentially empty, having only movable items from the small old clinic, and there are no current plans for furnishing it. They have a few wooden tables, a rocking chair which they are using for the dental chair, but don't have a single piece of equipment for the therapy or procedure rooms. We are currently working on ideas to help provide some



Marilyn Rinehart

furnishings for the clinic. We took along some medical supplies and equipment, but the clinic is now in need of larger items to furnish the rooms. This new health center serves the town of Santa Teresa as well as the surrounding villages. There are a few rural outpost clinics in the villages, but referrals to the larger clinic are made when a higher level of care is needed. 🌿

Why Chacocente?

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.

SCP Junta Directiva: Featuring our Board members

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. Thank you to everyone who donates and makes our work possible!! Here are two of our eleven board members:

Marilyn Rinehart. Marilyn grew up in the Rockbridge area, and attended Richland Center High School. Her parents, Halsey and Gyneth Rinehart, were early supporters of the Sister City Project. Marilyn worked for 27 years as a nursing educator and Associate Dean for Nursing at Madison College. Since retiring here in 2007, she has been volunteering at the Richland Community Free Clinic. She is married to Tom Conway, with two sons, Patrick and Michael. Marilyn says, "I dreamed of experiencing life in Central America for many years. When Linda Stadler asked if I would be interested in going with her I never hesitated!" She has been a proud member of the SCP Board since that first trip in 2011. Marilyn heads our secondary scholarship committee.



Marilyn and Linda at Catarina, Nicaragua

Linda Stadler. A Wisconsin native, Linda's interest in Central America goes back to her experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala 1977- 80. Linda and her husband Ron moved to Richland Center in 1985. They have been a host family for UW-Richland college students from Central America, traveled with their young sons to Guatemala and Honduras, and now volunteer in the Richland Free Clinic to help support Spanish-speaking community members. Linda works at the Richland Hospital. She has been active with the SCP for eight years and served as President for the past three, including five trips to Nicaragua. Linda says, "My career as an RN has been enhanced by being bilingual and my life is richer for all the experiences that people from Central America have shared with me."

Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project
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Gená Abarca, FFI

Green handprints mark her pledge to protect Chacocente's sea turtles

KICKAPOO SPRING FLING! ☀️ Food, Fun & Music ☀️ Sat. May 3

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, May 3 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
- 4-5:00 Craft Demonstrations, also Hula Hoops
- 5:30 Slideshow – "Scenes from Chacocente"
- 6:30 Raffle and Silent Auction results
- 7:00 "Wrannock" – Celtic music
- 7:30 on Astronomy event "Voyage to the Planets"

In addition, there will be a \$5 Raffle (first prize: His & Hers bicycles, also Nicaraguan hammock, binoculars); Silent Auction, with items by area artisans; 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 or visit <http://kvr.state.wi.us>

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