

SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 45

Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project

April 2016

First Impressions

Joe Stadler, Sister City Project (SCP) board member Linda Stadler's oldest son, accompanied her for the first time on a trip to Santa Teresa last November. We asked him to tell us about his impressions.



Linda Stadler

Joe Stadler meets children in the La Poma pre-school

What was the most unexpected experience you had there?

Joe: On our first evening in Santa Teresa we just happened to run into the former mayor, and an old friend of my mother's: Iván. Iván had never met me before, but when I was introduced as Linda's son, it was incredible how instantly and easily he welcomed me. We sat a while that evening in front of his house, my mom and I on either side of Ivan, while he and Mom caught up. I was amazed at how warmly I was received by Iván. He felt like family. I think this experience in particular speaks volumes about the relationships that the Sister City Project has built over the years, the deep and meaningful, collaborative, and trusting bonds that exist between people whose lives take place thousands of miles apart.

You traveled to visit several of the villages and attended meetings at the grade schools. How would you describe the travel? The schools? The people?

Joe: The travel into the villages is an adventure in rural landscapes! I enjoyed it immensely. The rugged unpaved passage through the Nicaraguan countryside can be rough, but it is also beautiful — dynamic river crossings, oxcart and motorcycle traffic, school kids walking, and lovely vistas. Our destinations on these adventures were usually the schools, which are often the only central buildings that exist in the communities that the SCP serves, and much of

the character of the teachers and the community at large is on display in its school building. People came in from all around for the meetings at the schools, the adults talked, the babies clung to their mothers, and the school kids enjoyed their snack time and played in the yard. The schools were where I really got a sense for the people of the communities, who they were, how they regard each other, and how they regard the people from the SCP.

It also opened my eyes how global the world is becoming. Even in the remote villages where people have no electricity, and sometimes no well or latrine, many people have cell phones. Some of the houses have solar panels or are along the newly constructed power lines, and although these dwellings are fairly primitive, you see television on in the evening.

Did any person make a special impression on you?

Joe: If I am forced to pick one person, it must be Alma. Even with a rusty sense for the Spanish language, I could tell that the conversations and the subject matter were sometimes contentious, and the topics for discussion at the meetings often stimulated very energetic and opinionated testimony. Alma seems to be at the center of all of this, the hub of communication, whether it be clarifying details when the language barriers become more apparent or perhaps just taking the time to reiterate things to the community members. At times excitable, and often humorous, Alma struck me as someone very even-keeled and sensible overall; patient, kind, and a good communicator. She is also brave, charismatic, and intelligent. She is honest and straightforward, an ideal person to handle the day-to-day operations of the Sister City Project.



Francisco Cruz

Alma works with villagers at a bio-intensive garden training.

Our 2015 Projects



Alma Susana Chávez

2015 graduates from the La Chota pre-school get their certificates.

- **School Supplies** – were provided for 210 elementary and pre-school students and for ten teachers in five Chacocente schools, plus extra food to supplement the government lunch program.
- **Secondary School Scholarships** – 29 scholarships, \$200 each, were awarded, enabling Chacocente young people to attend secondary school in 2015. Three students graduated this year.



Alma Susana Chávez

Luisa Arteaga, pleased with her new well. Luisa is one of the Escalante community health promoters. She helps provide local women with birth control options and advice.

- **Medical** – Community visits were made by a rural doctor and nurse. Basic medicines were provided for the La Pita clinic. Linda Stadler brought medical supplies from Wisconsin. Four training sessions were held for community health promoters. The topics were: viral diseases, family planning, first aid, and days dedicated to vaccination.
- **Water Projects** – SCP funded 30 water filters for home and school use, eleven well rope pumps, and materials for the construction of nine community-built wells, 16 well covers, and 22 latrines — also the extension of gravity-fed water piping for families in La Poma and El Papalón.

- **Gardens** – School gardens were planted in each of the five Chacocente schools. Seven family bio-intensive gardens were established.
- **Agriculture** – Because of the drought, \$25 agricultural vouchers were given to 161 farmers, to be used for such materials as seed and fertilizer.



Alma Susana Chávez

Oldimar Umaña picks up a bag of urea, supplied through the 2015 agricultural voucher program. Some farmers have these supplies left for this year, since many did not sow crops during the drought.

- **Environment** – SCP gave support for the leatherback sea turtle hatchery, equipment for Chacocente's sea turtle protection program and the rangers at the nesting beach, two beach clean-ups, a forest monitoring program, and twelve environmental education workshops in the Chacocente schools.
- **Partner Villages** – La Pita received materials for six family wells, complete with covers and rope pumps. In Eslabón-Tamagás, five families benefited from the five wells with covers, four rope pumps, and 15 water filters funded by its Wisconsin Village Partner families.
- **SCP Board Visits** – President José Marroquin visited Santa Teresa in January; Linda Stadler and VP Sally Dahir in November, all at their own expense. 🌿



Joe Stadler

Linda Stadler with staff at the Santa Teresa Health Center; looking at medical supplies she brought. Blood pressure cuffs, physical therapy equipment, and thermometers were especially appreciated.

Dealing with Drought

by Jane Furchgott

Walking through Chacocente's forest in January, I witnessed thirsty howler monkeys waiting in the trees for water to be drawn from a well. I saw one of these normally arboreal monkeys drinking out of a small puddle in a dry streambed, and another dead on the forest floor. In this prolonged drought, these endemic monkeys are suffering, some apparently dying of thirst.

The *El Niño* drought has not ended, despite some very rainy weather in November, which was enough to regenerate the water in many people's dry wells, but a mere drop in the bucket compared to the usual six-month rainy season. A wet *La Niña* year is predicted for 2016.

I didn't see signs of malnutrition in children. The SCP's focus on adequate school lunches has helped them. Grain sorghum was being harvested during my visit, but much of the corn, bean and rice crops had failed. During the last growing season, some of the Chacocente farmers left for Rio San Juan, just north of the Costa Rican border, where there was more rain. They were able to find agricultural work, and to harvest basic grains to bring home.

The drought has made the SCP board rethink our approach to wells and to agriculture. Predictions are that, with climate change, the *El Niño* phenomenon will recur more frequently, and that extremes of weather will become more common. At the suggestion of our Ag committee, we will not be giving seeds and fertilizer vouchers this year. We are focusing on the possibilities of bio-intensive soil-building techniques, as well as looking to other organizations focusing on alternative crops and new methods. We have seen that many of the hand-dug wells went dry in this past dry season, especially those in communities with much deforestation. It would be outside our capabilities to provide the funds, technical knowledge, and follow-up for a deep drilled community well and water system, powered by electric lines or solar panels. We are investigating connections with other organizations which do this kind of water engineering. 🌱



Doña Paula of El Terrero carrying water.

Jane Furchgott



Francisco Cruz

SCP Coordinator Alma Susana Chávez distributed the food.

Christmas Food Aid

The two-year drought has made harvests poor for farmers. Last year women in the Chacocente village asked us for possible food aid for their families. Since the SCP does not usually give charity, our board decided against this request. We looked for other possible sources of help, but found that most food aid organizations only work through government institutions.

As it turned out, thanks to our friendship with Sarah Otterstrom, Executive Director of the environment-focused NGO Paso Pacifico, working in Nicaraguan communities south of Santa Teresa, we were able to find some food aid for the Chacocente villagers. In December, Sarah alerted us that some surplus food from the Paso Pacifico program, *Proyecto Noble Salud y Educación*, would be donated to the SCP if we could arrange getting it very quickly. SCP coordinator Alma Susana Chávez mobilized villagers Mario Bravo, one of the very few Chacocente truck owners, and Casto Vado, driving the tourist co-op's truck, to pick up these food supplies at Ostional, Rivas, about two hours' drive south of Santa Teresa.

Just before the Christmas season, the food was distributed to 160 Chacocente families, making it a gift that was especially appreciated. Each family received five pounds of beans and rice, plus corn, soybeans, and nutritional packets for children. Our thanks to Paso Pacifico, Dick and Nancy Noble, and the American Nicaragua Foundation. 🌱

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.

Everyone is welcome at SCP meetings, held once a month at the Richland Hospital. Call Marilyn Rinehart at (608) 347-5473 for dates or information about the SCP.

Visiting the Cerda Family

by Jane Furchgott

SCP board member Elizabeth Pflug-Froh and her husband Tom Froh, a former teacher, generously offered a \$500 prize to the graduating SCP secondary scholarship student with the highest grades. Their idea was to encourage our students to excel in school, and to inspire them to achieve their dreams. This first year's recipient was Jeidi Julieth Cerda, from the village of El Terrero.

Alma Susana and I went to visit the Cerda family in their small house. Jeidi invited us into the main room, piled with sacks of stored grain. It was divided from the rest of the house by blue tarp walls, hung with colorful family photos. Jeidi, who seems smart and alert, was very pleased to receive the certificate and prize money.



Alma Susana Chávez

Jeidi's parents, Rosa Umaña and Don Tomás Cerda

used some of the bio-intensive methods, and saw that this improved his yield. He admitted he couldn't really read and write, because in his youth they didn't prioritize education.

Later that day Don Tomás said he would like to take the job, and that Jeidi would help him with reports. We hope that this family teamwork will lead to a successful expanded bio-intensive program, as this method of soil improvement using deep cultivation, soil enrichment, and intensive planting requires less water than traditional gardening. 🌱

SCP Scholarship Program



Jane Furchgott

Gerald Baltodano was a first year (seventh grade) scholarship student in 2015.

The secondary school scholarship program continues to be an important piece of our work to build a better future for the Chacocente communities. Of the students who applied for 2016 scholarships, there were 19 continuing students and ten new students with adequate grades in 2015. We require an 80% average for the previous year, and service to their communities throughout the school year. Parents and students alike reiterate their hope that we will continue this program. — Marilyn Rinehart

Alma Susana Chávez



Jeidi Cerda welcomes Jane Furchgott to her house.

She said "I would like to thank you very much for this prize. It means a lot to me to achieve it, and I hope to use it to further my studies. Bless you, may God shelter and keep you." Jeidi told me she was 18 years old, and that her family included her parents and an older sister, Liseth. Jeidi likes studying, and hopes to continue her education in order to have a professional career and help her parents. She plans to study to become a teacher, and wants to learn English as well. She would like to come back to the Chacocente schools to teach.

After talking with Jeidi, I turned my attention to her father, Don Tomás Cerda. Don Tomás, a serious man who grew up in a hard-working market gardener family, was a possible candidate for a local villager to supervise the SCP bio-intensive gardening program. I asked him whether he would be willing to get further bio-intensive training, and then, for a small salary, work part time to train and supervise interested local community people in these techniques. Don Tomás told me he had already

Chacocente Communities' Conservation Role Expands

by Jane Furchgott

When I went to Nicaragua in January, one of my goals was to understand the changes in the management of Chacocente Wildlife Refuge, especially the sea turtle conservation. After former Chacocente director Jeffer Cruz left early in 2015, no specific person was in charge at the *arribada* (sea turtle mass-nesting) beach, although the Refuge's park rangers and a Nicaraguan army contingent were continuing their protective role. At this time a new collaborative group was formed to help make and implement decisions for Chacocente Wildlife Refuge.

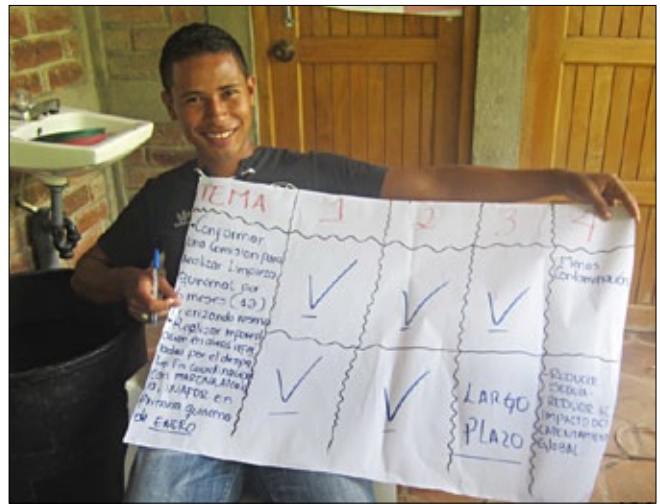
This "Committee for the Protection, Conservation, Collaboration, and Care of Chacocente" (CPCCC) represents the most active management role local people of the Refuge have yet enjoyed. Although it includes people in the government, police, and army, the CPCCC is especially representative of the Chacocente communities. Four of its six officers are Chacocente villagers, while the SCP's Alma Susana Chávez is secretary and Edgar Herrera of Fauna and Flora International (FFI) is treasurer.

In the regional office of MARENA (Nicaragua's DNR), I talked with with old-timer Humberto Campos, now technical advisor for the region, and the new government environmental delegate Karla Hernandez. They, along with FFI, have put a lot of hope and responsibility into the possibilities of the CPCCC. In Alma's recent report, she mentions the current projects of the group. Its vigilance committee is working on security at the *arribada* beach and has shaped an agreement among the government entities to enforce environmental laws and make arrests at sea as well as on land. The CPCCC is beginning a native species reforestation project involving local farmers and schoolchildren, as well as doing



Joe Stadler

Linda Stadler & Alma Susana Chávez meet with Karla Hernandez and Humberto Campos in the regional office of MARENA.



Alma Susana Chávez

At a CPCCC meeting, Manuel Cortez, a village's youth and fishermen's representative, holds the schedule for reforestation.

mapping and signage to encourage tourism in the reserve.

Just as I arrived in Santa Teresa, I heard that a new Coordinator had been appointed and trained by MARENA for Chacocente. Alma and I met young Deyvin Mayorga on his first day on the job at the beach station. He seemed amiable, with good ideas, and was interested in our work. SCP's Alma, because of her long term involvement with Chacocente's conservation and people, has been invaluable to the new MARENA authorities as a liaison with the communities. In the village of Escalante, we stopped by to visit Ariel Arteaga, the Chacocente park ranger who is MARENA's education coordinator and works with Alma in the schools. Ariel believes that Alma, the rangers, and the communities hold the vision for Chacocente's future, with the Sister City Project as their important ally.

Despite the change in personnel, the 2015-16 *arribada* season went well, with about 70,000 olive ridley sea turtle nests and 472,000 hatchlings, up a little from the previous year. There was more egg-robbing in the first part of the season, due to the return of a poacher family to nearby El Astillero, but protection improved later on. The FFI hatchery had only two female leatherbacks nesting this season, and released 33 hatchlings, although it also protected many nests of two less endangered species. 🌿

Our SCP website is <http://santa-teresa.org>.

All our past newsletters are here, with announcements of events and information about our projects. If you would like to receive the electronic *Sister City Update*, with color photos, email us at santa-teresa@wccn.org. **Visit us on Facebook!** (Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project)

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Jane Furchgott

Jeidi Julieth Cerda received the Froh Academic Excellence Award (page 4).

KICKAPOO SPRING FLING! ☀️ Food, Fun & Nature ☀️ Sat. May 7

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 7 at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, S3661 State Hwy. 131, north of La Farge, Wisconsin.



Spring Fling Schedule

\$10 includes meal and programs:

- 3-4:00 History Hike
- 4-5:00 Plant Walk
- 4-6:30 Grilled Brats & Burgers, salads, homemade desserts, beverages
- 3-5:00 Fly-fishing demonstration, Kids' activities
- 5-5:30 Nicaragua slide talk
- 5:30-6 *Call of the Frog* presentation
- 6-7:00 Nature Hike
- 7:00 Raffle and Silent Auction results

In addition, there will be a \$5 Raffle (first prize: Kona bicycle, also Eagle Optics monocular, Nicaraguan hammock); 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>

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