

# SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 34

Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project

October 2010



*El Papalón children in front of their school*

## Revisiting Chacocente

*A letter from Brian David, SCP's 2008 intern who looked at ways to improve education in Chacocente. This summer he and his friend Emily Quayle did a study of education in rural Nicaragua.*

Emily and I stayed three weeks in Santa Teresa and about seven days in the communities where the SCP works. We spent our time in Chacocente talking with families and teachers about education and life in the communities. The community members were even kinder and more open than I remembered from my previous visits. Life in the communities is, as always, beautiful but difficult, and we feel very lucky indeed to have gotten to spend time out there. Going from community to community on horses (or mules in my case) was a real treat for us and the food was spectacular. But what was most enjoyable for us were the times we got to sit with families and talk with them about their lives and their hopes for the future. We feel blessed to have gotten to hear about and to share a bit of the lives that the community members live.

We went to Nicaragua in order to find out how small non-profit organizations are working to improve education in rural Nicaragua, and to help small non-profits gain a better understanding of how they can

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## Turning Dollars into Córdoba, Bricks, Water Filters, Medications and Books

*by Janet Gee*

So what was accomplished in 2010 when your generously donated dollars became Nicaraguan Córdoba?? Here are some projects that we have financed in six communities of the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge and its buffer zone. These villages, which have a total population of nearly one thousand people, are located near the Pacific coast of the Santa Teresa municipality, in southwestern Nicaragua.

- 203 grade school students and their 10 teachers in five schools have received school supplies and extra food for their lunch program.
- Financial support for 12 training sessions for community health workers. Topics included child care, first aid, family planning, careful use of water filters. Monthly village doctor visits and basic medications given to supplement doctor's supplies.

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### Revisiting Chacocente, continued

effect change in education. We think that small non-profits, like the SCP, have lower overhead costs and have closer relationships with the people they are trying to help than the large non-profits. This allows small non-profits to be more efficient and effective in their aid.



We recognize, however, that while large non-profits can afford to research their methods and effectiveness, small non-profits cannot. And that is where we hope to help small non-profits, at least a little bit.

We were amazed to see the difficult conditions in which the SCP works and accomplishes change. We visited a few places in Nicaragua, but none were so difficult to get to and so difficult to work in as Chacocente. We think that the SCP's efforts in this region have been an immense help for its impoverished residents (most of whom are in extreme or severe poverty according to Nicaragua's own ranking). We hope that the SCP continues its work in the region, trying to improve and expand upon its methods in rural education. ✨

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*Advertising the SCP. The final touch on a latrine seems to be "Hermanamiento Wisconsin" spray-painted through a stencil.*

Tom Stadler

### Turning Dollars into Córdobas..., continued

- Donation of 101 water filters for home and school use, 18 well rope pumps, and materials for 3 community-built wells, 18 well lids and 5 latrines.
- \$50 vouchers given to 78 farmers to purchase tools, fencing, seed or other farming needs. In exchange for this, they commit to attending agricultural training classes where topics will include prevention of soil erosion, use of safe fertilizers, and the problems caused by using fire to prepare cropland.
- Support for a hatchery to save the endangered leatherback turtle, equipment for forest and beach guards and help to promote the "I Don't Eat Turtle Eggs" campaign.

### How the Sister City Project operates

For the past ten years, the SCP, a grassroots non-governmental organization, has sent funds to help some 164 families with education, health, agriculture and environmental issues. Our paid Nicaraguan facilitator, Alma Susana Chávez, lives in Santa Teresa, has a biology degree, teaching experience, and a great interest in the environment and community development. She receives the funds which are wired to Nicaragua through the Santa Teresa Alcaldía bank account and then buys and distributes the materials according to the annual plan.

Before the beginning of the calendar year, SCP agrees

on an operating plan for the next twelve months with Alma and the community leaders. This will determine how and when the donated money will be spent, and is decided according to the guidelines established by SCP and the most pressing needs expressed by the villages. The work is divided into three four-month phases according to the requirements of weather and the calendar. For example, any construction work will have to take place during the dry months of November to May. Education and health projects are ongoing throughout the year.

For 2010 we were able to offer \$18,246 for the projects. As of the end of September, nearly all the work planned for this year has been satisfactorily completed. President Derrick Gee and his wife Janet will be visiting with Alma later on in the year to make a final check on progress and to discuss plans for work in 2011.

Board members visit the communities at least two times a year. During these visits, we are repeatedly told how grateful the people are for all the help that SCP supporters have given over the years. Life in this subsistence region is very difficult and always at the mercy of the weather. The support that we all contribute gives hope for a better future to these hard working people. On their behalf, we thank you all for your kind interest and magnanimity. ✨

# Rains Affect Turtle Nesting

by Jane Furchgott

“The main actor in this sea turtle nesting season is the rain!!” writes Fauna & Flora International (FFI) director José Urteaga. “This year has been one of the rainiest years in history. It has affected the protection operations inside the Chacocente Refuge. Road access has been so bad that at times people in the Refuge have been isolated.

“There have been low numbers of turtles nesting and, by the end of August, no arribadas. Probably the phenomenon of heavy rains is also affecting the sea turtle nesting.

“Although we don’t know for certain what will be the final impact of this rainy season, with the rainiest month – October – yet to come, we can expect a negative effect on agriculture in this area. This would bring economic problems to the communities and increase pressure on the sea turtles and other forest resources. Even economic alternatives like tourism have been affected by the rain. For example, Cosertuchaco, the tourism coop of La Poma, La Chota, and Escalante, could not work in July and August because of the rains.”

This year’s sea turtle protection will be better coordinated than last year’s. FFI plans to support sea turtle protection on the arribada beach as well as in the leatherback hatchery. With funds from USAID, twelve community members will be employed as park guards to work with MARENA, and a biologist will also be hired.

SCP facilitator Alma Susana Chávez reports that the Santa Teresa mayor’s office will be supplying food and fuel for the community guards and police at the arribada



Aaron Wunnicke

## *The Pacific Ocean at Chacocente*

beach. The SCP is providing flashlights, batteries, and water filters for the guards.

In the schools, Alma has been giving workshops focusing on natural resources protection, especially sea turtles. She writes, “This makes the students love sea turtles and wish to get to know them, because, despite living in Chacocente, many children have never seen the turtles.” Alma is also leading beach clean-ups with Santa Teresa secondary school students. ✨

## Returned Peace Corps Volunteers

We thank the RPCV/ Madison for their confidence in our program. Their 2009 contribution included \$1,000 to continue work in La Solera, and support for the La Poma communal well project. This year’s grant funded \$500 for four rope pumps for village wells, and \$1,000 for clay water filters for El Terrero households. All these projects were completed in 2010. ✨

## Full Color E-newsletter

Would you like to receive the Sister City Update in your email, before the paper copies even arrive? It will save us postage and let you see the photos in vibrant color. If you would prefer this option, please email us at [santa-teresa@wccnica.org](mailto:santa-teresa@wccnica.org) and let us know. ✨

Our SCP website is [santa-teresa.wccnica.org](http://santa-teresa.wccnica.org) — All newsletters from the past few years are available to read online, along with announcements of upcoming events.



José Gabriel Martínez Fonseca

Olive ridley sea turtle eggs being laid

## A Trip to El Terrero

SCP Vice-president José Marroquin made a very short visit to Santa Teresa at the end of August. He and our facilitator, Alma Susana Chávez, hiked into El Terrero, one of the more remote Chacocente villages. Serenaded by howler monkeys in the trees overhead, Jose and Alma waded several times across the Rio Escalante, which was high and rapid from heavy rains. In the village, José was glad to see how the residents liked and respected Alma, jokingly calling her “Mom.”

The SCP three-year ecological agriculture program is continuing in El Terrero and La Chota. Alma has hired agronomist Everth Torrez to give a series of workshops on agricultural techniques. (He was the environmental officer for a former Santa Teresa mayor and led the campaign to stop the El Astillero Resort.) Everth accompanied Alma and José.

The farmers gathered at the El Terrero school for the workshop on leguminous green manures. José was impressed with Everth’s presentation, which was strong and clearly explained, reinforced with drawings and handouts. Everth involved his audience in the meeting. Later he will plant two test plots, with and without the green manure crops, so people can judge the results.

On the Chacocente bus, José met Vidal Reyes, an old friend from La Poma. Vidal reported that the La Poma water project, which José’s family supported through the SCP, had been completed successfully. A strong flowing well had been improved and piping provided to bring the water, by gravity, to individual homesteads. Vidal said that some villagers now have faucets in their yards, even showerheads! The women, who usually carry the water, especially appreciate this. It will improve their health, Vidal said, mentioning a woman who got a hernia from carrying water too soon after giving birth.

*Everyone is welcome to come to our meetings and join our discussions. SCP meetings are held once a month in the Pippin rooms at the Richland Hospital. Call Janet Gee at 608 588-3942 for meeting dates, or information about the SCP.*



Everth Torrez explains the benefits of green manures to the farmers in the SCP agriculture program.

José Marroquin

José asked the El Terrero villagers how the SCP makes their life better. They answered that, with our help for basic needs, they are able to save a little money that can be used to buy animals or invest in other projects. ✨

## Benefit Music by Wrannock

This year’s Burrito Supper features a new band, Wrannock. Wrannock is the family trio of Mike, Lisa, and Angus Mossman, offering traditional Celtic music on guitar, tin whistle, mandolin, tenor banjo, piano, bodhrán, and vocals. They perform “the music of our heritage, instrumentals and ballads that stir our souls. Julee Agar will be the caller, leading Irish ceili dances, which include contra style, square and circle dances, plus an occasional Irish polka or waltz. The music starts at 7:30 pm on October 22 at Blue Highways. Supper is at 5:30. ✨

*Donations to support the work of the Sister City Project are always gratefully accepted. In November you’ll receive our one-and-only appeal letter for this year. Please send as much as you can afford. Every tax-deductible dollar goes a long way in Nicaragua.*

**You don’t have to wait till November to donate—Make checks out to Santa Teresa SCP, and mail to Treasurer Stein Goering, c/o SCP, PO Box 483. Richland Center, WI 53581.**

# We Discover Chacocente

## History of the SCP, Part Two

by Jane Furchgott

“One of the great marvels that God has given us is now in grave danger.” In a passionate letter written in 1997, Santa Teresa mayor José Martínez asked the Sister City Project’s help in Chacocente Wildlife Refuge, a Nicaraguan national reserve within the Santa Teresa municipality. Chacocente includes one of the world’s eight remaining olive ridley sea turtle arribada (mass-nesting) beaches, one of the last large stands of Central America’s dry tropical deciduous forest, and several of Santa Teresa’s poorest and most remote villages.

In September 1998, an SCP delegation visited Santa Teresa and Chacocente to learn more about the situation. We enlisted Rob Horwich of Community Conservation, who had worked with communities worldwide to protect their wildlife, to help advise us.

Soon afterwards, Nicaragua’s President Arnaldo Alemán, who owned land nearby, started to personally bulldoze a highway through the Chacocente forest just behind the sea turtle beach. Mayor Martínez stopped him in a face-to-face confrontation, and asked our help to prevent further destruction of the refuge. We raised money to bring Martínez to the 1999 International Sea Turtle Symposium in Texas, accompanied by Jane Furchgott. He informed the world’s sea turtle

experts about the Chacocente situation and received support and publicity. President Alemán rerouted his highway outside the Refuge.

In 1999, at José Martínez’s request, the SCP raised money to buy a sea turtle protection boat for the Santa Teresa municipality. It was used by the guards at Chacocente’s arribada beach to accost fishermen and turtle egg robbers in the Refuge’s waters.



Jane Furchgott

Rob Horwich and José Marroquin talk with Mayor José Martínez (at head of table) and his wife Jeamileth, 1998.

Peter Smith, a Hillsboro, Wisconsin ex-Amish farmer and mechanic, visited Santa Teresa independently on a 1999 tour with the Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua. Returning home, he joined the SCP. In July 2000, Peter returned to Nicaragua for an extended stay as the SCP’s volunteer representative. After attending language school, he moved to Santa Teresa and began to spend time in Chacocente, getting to know the villagers and learn about the Refuge.

His house-to-house survey of El Papalón and La Palma revealed to Peter that the poverty and health problems in these Chacocente communities were more severe than he had imagined. He felt that dealing with these problems and regenerating deforested areas of the reserve were priorities. The villagers wanted us to focus on health and water projects, since sources of clean water were scarce.

Despite the language barrier, Peter was soon able to help the villagers of La Palma, El Papalón, and Escalante organize the cooperative “Association of Harmony between the Communities and Nature of Chacocente.” In 2000, we funded the construction of

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President Alemán’s aborted highway project. He’s quoting his election slogan “Arnoldo is Progress,” with the sly addition, “(personal).” — La Prensa newspaper cartoon, 1999



Jane Furchgott

*Peter Smith with Ervin Zamora, La Palma, 2001*

two wells, the people's first choice, and the beginning of our long-term well program. The SCP supplied the materials and the community members the labor, our usual partnership.

In 2000 the SCP applied for and received federal 501c3 non-profit status, and for the first time elected officers, with President Jane Furchgott, Vice-president Stein Goering, Secretary Derrick Gee, and Treasurer Emil Haney. Newsletters, edited by Stein Goering, were sent out twice a year. More funds were needed, and a spring benefit soup supper was added to the fall Burrito Supper. Peggy Swan and Ron Solinger organized community art shows and variety shows to benefit the Chacocente projects. SCP board members visited Santa Teresa more regularly now,



Peter Smith

*Community members working on the La Palma/El Papalón health center construction, 2001*

herbalist Estermila Prudente and a local doctor. These health promotoras learned to grow herbs and use the dry forest plants in medications they prepared, as well as to monitor and care for the health of people in their villages, who had no access to public health care and couldn't afford doctors or medicines. A small health center, with an herb kitchen for the promotoras' use, was constructed in the forest between El Papalón and La Palma.

In 2002 the SCP received a grant for a chicken-raising project and wells in a new Chacocente village, La Poma. This was the first of continuing, yearly, generous grants from the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Madison.



Jane Furchgott

*Natural medicine promotoras, Ivania and Daria, outside the health center*

We began funding school supplies and books for the La Palma/El Papalon school. In 2002 we raised money for a two-room school – their first school ever – to be built in the community of Escalante, the land and labor donated by the villagers.



Jane Furchgott

*Cooking for the dedication party at the Escalante school, 2003*

The SCP continued to work with Rob Horwich, although various factors prevented us from fully embracing his vision of how the Chacocente residents might share in the management of the Refuge. He suggested hiring a Chacocente villager to organize conservation activities, but the group rejected the idea because Peter felt it would disrupt the equality of the communities. Rob's earlier attempts to fund a resident biologist by applying for grants from other conservation organizations were unsuccessful, but in 2002, he wrote a grant for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service which gave us funding for two projects. Together we published an educational bilingual coloring book, "The Tropical Dry Forest and Sea Turtle Beaches of Nicaragua's Pacific Coast," which has been distributed to thousands of Santa Teresa school children over the years.

We were also able to hire two Chacocente men to staff Chacocente's first hatchery for critically endangered leatherback sea turtles. The hatchery was set up in collaboration with Randall Arauz of the Sea Turtle Restoration Project. Due to a poor choice of coordinator, it was not successful.

Seeing the exploitative sea turtle situation firsthand, Peter took action. In 2002, along with a Nicaraguan helper, he researched and prepared a detailed report on sea turtle egg trafficking, accusing MARENA's Chacocente director and others of involvement in this illegal trade. The report was presented to the Santa Teresa municipal council and to the current mayor, Porfirio Cortés. Cortés found the report "a useful tool" and the MARENA director was removed.

Mayor Cortés, a conservative Alemán supporter, appreciated and worked well with left-wing Peter Smith. Cortés started the practice of offering the municipal truck to bring SCP project materials to the Chacocente villages.

Before Peter returned to Wisconsin in January, 2003, he organized elections in the Chacocente communities, where representatives were chosen to form the Chacocente Commission, a counterpart to the SCP, to work out project ideas. Peter also chose a young educated Nicaraguan, Leonidas Grijalva, to be the new SCP liaison person and brought him to Wisconsin to meet the board in September, 2002. 🌿

*To be continued in a later issue...*

*Part one of this history, in the April 2007 issue of Sister City Update, can be read on the SCP website, [santa-teresa.wccnica.org](http://santa-teresa.wccnica.org)*



Jane Furchgott

*Sidewalk repair in Santa Teresa*

Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project  
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## BURRITO SUPPER & DANCE

You are invited to our 16th annual benefit Burrito Supper & Dance on Friday evening, October 22nd. It will take place at Blue Highways, 165 N. Central, Richland Center.

The 5:30 Burrito Supper will feature tortillas with all the fixings, salsas, carnitas, beans, rice and homemade cakes and pies...all you can eat.

Starting at 7:30, Wrannock, a family trio, will play and sing traditional Celtic music. Caller Julee Agar will lead Irish ceili dancing. Dances will be taught and all ages are welcome.

A suggested donation of \$10 per adult or \$5 per child includes both dinner and dance. If you would like to help or have questions, call Jane Furchgott at 583-2431 or Mary Bard at 647-2594.

Money raised at this event will go to benefit the rural villagers and the sea turtles of Santa Teresa, Nicaragua.



Janet Gee