

SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 33

Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project

April 2010

Learning from Chacocente's Lifestyle

by Chelsea Bagot

While riding in a crowded truck bed over bumpy roads to reach the villages where the Sister City Project work is done, I began to understand the differences between life in a small village in Chacocente and my normal life in Richland County, Wisconsin.

During my daily commute to Richland Center, I drive over smooth roads through the countryside with a hot cup of tea and NPR on the radio. On the once-daily public transportation between Santa Teresa and the villages of Chacocente, I encountered huge bags of dry rice and beans, construction materials stacked on the floor, people of all ages crowded together, and even a green parrot held in a cloth sack by an eager little boy. As exotic as this may seem, what struck me was the fundamental similarity in the travel pattern. Commerce, government business, and higher education take place in the city, while the rural lifestyle is valued by those who live it for its peace and quiet, closeness to nature and the practical consideration of having the ability to grow food.

So if I have essentially the same routine as these people, what is the difference between my way of life and



A La Chota boy in front of the stove where his family cooks their homegrown food

Derrick Gee

theirs? Though many differences exist, I believe that one key difference may lie in the use of resources.



Alma Susana Chávez

Aaron Wunnicke and Chelsea Bagot use animal power to tour the Chacocente communities.

Let's say I woke up this morning and learned that I was required to use only my global fair share of fossil fuels. My life would change drastically and in the end might look very similar to that of the generous people who fed and housed me on my visit to Chacocente. Gone are the unnecessary energy-using conveniences: hair dryers, washing machines, "mood lighting" and this computer on my desk. Home electricity is minimal, perhaps provided by a few solar panels. Transportation relies on people and animal power for shorter distances and the public four-wheel drive bus for getting into town. Without the fossil fuels, I have to use my time differently, but life goes on with the same priorities as before.

— Continued on page 2

Learning from Chacocente, continued

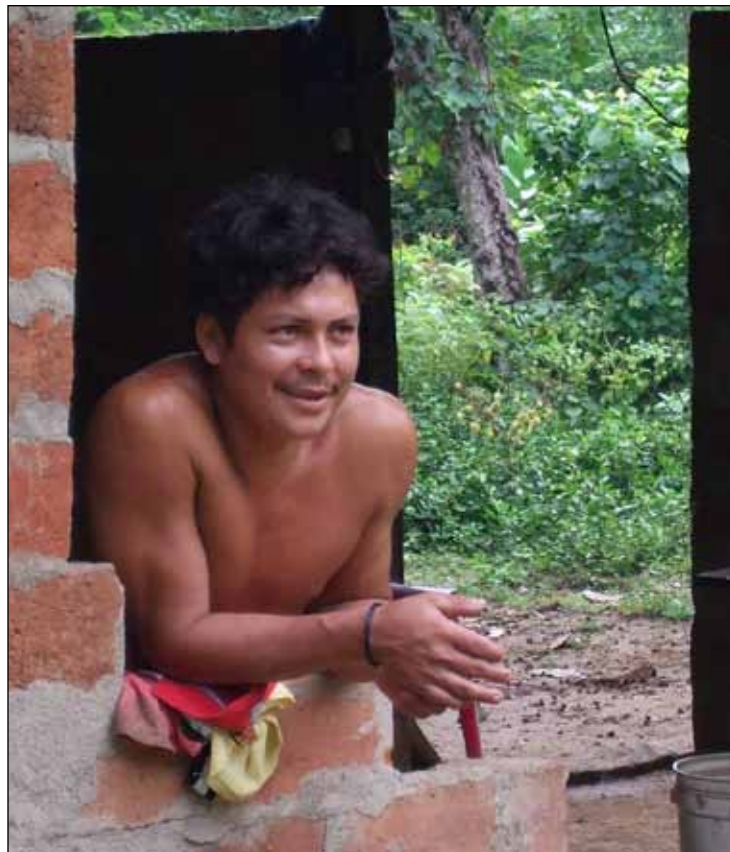
I have heard friends or acquaintances refer to life in poverty or third world countries and say, "I could never live like that." My revelation from spending time with families in Chacocente was not only that we could, but that in many ways, we actually do. Life in Chacocente contains more work and more risk, but the general pillars of a fulfilling life are the same: living for health, being with loved ones, and the completion of satisfying work. And these people have the moral superiority of living in a way that doesn't bankrupt the planet of its resources. If we try to attain the goal of a planet that supports a decent standard of life for all people on earth, the impetus for change relies on the self-restraint of the first world. Our use of resources will need to more closely resemble that of the Chacocente villagers if we truly want to reduce carbon emissions and achieve a more equitable global society.



Derrick Gee

Chacocente's once-daily public bus is a large open truck fitted with benches along the sides and a canvas top.

By supporting the continuing work of the Sister City Project you help maintain a nearly carbon-neutral way of life by giving its people resources to live healthily and sustainably in their villages. The villagers I stayed with acknowledged the difficulty of their situation, but were committed to living in Chacocente and enjoying its simple but profound benefits, including the security of growing their own food, the independence of owning their own fields, and the pleasure of watching *cara blanca* monkeys play in the treetops. This is enough to keep them living and working there, despite the hardships of harsh weather, seasonally impassible roads, and children living away from home to earn wages as domestic workers.



Derrick Gee

With help from family members this La Chota man dug and built his family's own well. Richland Center's Jefferson School fifth graders raised money for the materials.

As a true sister city relationship, I found that both sides of the exchange have the ability to share with and learn from each other. From latrines, to school buildings, to water filters, the SCP has many projects that have helped the people of Chacocente. Hopefully our exchange with them provides us with as many benefits in transforming our own lives. Visiting the Chacocente region and meeting its people is an experience I am very grateful for, and one which will help shape my life as I give back to the Sister City Project by supporting its mission in Nicaragua. 🌿

A QUICK HISTORY

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 starting to work with communities in the Refuge's buffer zone as well.

Santiago's Message

by Aaron Wunnicke, new SCP Board member

Following is my translation of a video message by Don Santiago Vado. Don Santiago is a leader from the community of El Papalon. He is actively engaged with the Sister City Project and is especially willing to experiment with more "eco-friendly" agricultural practice: (i.e. building terraces, reducing pesticide and fertilizer use, and managed grazing.) He graciously hosted us and provided a horse tour among some of the various communities and projects the Sister City is involved with. Don Santiago credits Peter Smith for arranging an operation that saved his life. Personal relationships build the trust and confidence that are essential to fulfilling the mission of the Sister City Project and it is these personal relationships that remind us the mission is worthwhile.

Don Santiago: All the communities are proud and happy to have the support of the Sister City. We know that it's a sacrifice that our friends in Wisconsin make to raise the funds that we need so much here in the Chacocente communities: El Papalon, Escalante, La Poma, La Chota, El Terrero. We're thankful for the help that has been given with latrines, water wells, hand pumps, and everything that has to do with health and education: notebooks and pencils for the kids and the schools here in the Refuge. We're very happy for all the help that has been given to us. We're working well with the facilitator, Alma Susana.

We ask the people of the Sister City that they continue collaborating with our communities that have historically been underserved by the government.



Alma Susana Chávez

Santiago's daughter shows the household water filter.



Derrick Gee

Don Santiago grows guineos, small sweet bananas.

Now we have support from the local municipality with the help of the Sister City Project working in the communities of Chacocente, and once again we ask that you continue to make a sacrifice and an effort for us. There are so many poor people here that still don't have necessities. That's what I wish for. Also I wish luck and greetings to all those in Wisconsin that work and struggle with us. Hello everyone and thank you for all the help you have given. Saludos a todos!

Aaron: Thank you, Don Santiago, for the hospitality you provided us while staying in your home. You live in a beautiful place and we feel fortunate to have been able to share this time with you.

Don Santiago: My home is at your service because you (the Sister City Project) have been so good to us, especially with my family and all the people of the community. My home is always open to the people of the Sister City. ✨

Donations to support the work of the Sister City Project are always gratefully accepted. They may be sent to our treasurer Stein Goering, %SCP, PO Box 483, Richland Center, WI 53581.

Chacocente Projects, 2009

Excerpts from the President's Annual Report

by Derrick Gee

In our sister municipality of Santa Teresa where tough times are the norm and resilience is well-honed, the people are somewhat cushioned from national and international politics. Mayor Ivan Dinarte, a long-time supporter of our project, has completed his first year in office and helped us significantly with transport of building materials and school supplies through the roadless territory where we work. A mid-year drought seriously impacted the rice and corn harvests. For families, like those with whom we work, who depend for food on what they can grow, crop failure is a particular hardship. Our well-established supply of a hot lunch to all 200 school children in the area we serve was particularly welcome.

We continued to emphasize support for the newer villages in our area, that is, those around the periphery of the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge. These are La Chota, El Terrero and La Solera. In all, in 2009 we supplied materials for 6 wells, 19 well lids, 13 rope pumps, 101 water filters and 3 latrines.



Alma Susana Chávez

La Solera villagers unload locally-made bricks from the Santa Teresa municipal truck. The Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Madison helped fund these materials for wells and latrines.

Everyone is welcome at our monthly SCP meetings. Call Janet Gee at 608 588-3942 for meeting dates, and other SCP information.



Alma Susana Chávez

A Chacocente mother cooking the school lunches.

Fifty farmers in these new villages entered the second year of our three-year sustainable farming program. For several years, we received critical support for our health program from Dr. Quintanilla, who braved extremes of conditions to visit the health clinics in each of our villages every month and to train volunteer "health promoters". The good doctor left the area in 2009 and so we are now hoping to develop a similar relationship with his young replacement, Dr. Danny Moraga.

Our support for the delicate environment of Chacocente continued through education of the young students in our schools and financing protection of the sea turtles. We were delighted to have Alma Susana Chávez continue as our project facilitator in 2009. Her commitment to the communities and the environment, her integrity and enthusiasm make our work possible. ♣



Tom Stadler

Our hard-working facilitator, Alma Susana, takes a moment to relax.

Sea Turtle News

by Jane Furchgott

Chacocente is one of eight olive ridley sea turtle arribada beaches left in the world. This past nesting season there were some very large mass nestings, but the total number of nests laid, 42,000, was down somewhat from the higher numbers of the last two years. A five-day arribada of 10,000 turtles in September was disturbed by extensive egg robbing, due to the lack of resources in the Nicaraguan DNR (MARENA) to pay guards.

After this invasion, an emergency plan was instituted with funds from Denmark. Working together, FFI (Fauna and Flora International), MARENA, the police, armed forces, and Chacocente community members successfully protected the arribada beach during the rest of the season. Marine patrols kept fishermen from killing turtles at sea.

The SCP's direct part in this effort was funding supplies, such as flashlights and rubber boots, used by the community members working as MARENA guards. (When Aaron Wunnicke visited Chacocente in January, they asked us to continue this aid, since only the SCP provides it.)

The problem of poverty exacerbates the difficulties of natural resources conservation, especially in a populated reserve. The SCP is focusing on environmental education, which has made a difference in the villagers' outlook, but more work needs to be done to provide viable alternative income sources.

We continue to support the Chacocente community workers in FFI's leatherback hatchery, a small but important outpost of protection for the disappearing Pacific leatherback sea turtle. Sadly, this was the worst year ever. A lone female leatherback, nesting eight different times, was the only one to come ashore during the 2009-10 nesting season. Our hope is that of her 187 hatchlings, some will live to return to nest at Chacocente. ♣

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



José Gabriel Martínez Fonseca

The view from the cliffs above Chacocente's olive ridley sea turtle nesting beach

Tour Nicaragua with SCP

The SCP is planning a tourist trip in January 2011 for people who would like to visit Nicaragua and see our projects first hand. Vice-president José Marroquin will lead the small tour group of under ten people.

The trip will begin in Granada, a beautiful old colonial city on Lake Nicaragua, where we will take a boat trip to the little islands. Then we travel to Santa Teresa's Chacocente Wildlife Refuge where the SCP's projects are centered. We will meet the community people, eat and sleep in their homes, and see the farms, schools, wells, and health projects that the SCP supports. There will be time spent by the ocean at the sea turtle nesting beach (probably seeing turtles) and visiting the MARENA guard headquarters. We will spend the last couple of days of the nine-day trip seeing sights such as an active volcano, local fiestas and shopping at Masaya's market.

The cost of the tour will be around \$1200 to \$1300, apart from the air fare, which is currently under \$500. This will cover food, transportation and lodging. For more information contact Jack or Margaret Lee, 11640 Tunnelville Road, La Farge, WI 54639, phone (608) 625-2252, email leeward@mwt.net. ♣

Our SCP website is santa-teresa.wccnica.org – check it out and see the newsletter photos in full color. All newsletters from the past couple of years are available to read online, along with announcements of upcoming events.

Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project

P.O. Box 483

Richland Center, WI 53581

SCP Website: santa-teresa.wccnica.org



Alma Susana Chávez

Cándido Chávez shows his tomato plants. The planting season in Nicaragua is starting now, too!

US Postage

PAID

Permit # 48

R.C. WI 53581

Change Service Requested

KICKAPOO SPRING FLING! ☀️ Food, Fun & Music ☀️ Sat. May 22

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

The Spring Fling schedule:

4:30-7:00 Grilled Brats and Burgers, salads, homemade desserts, Nicaraguan gallo pinto – Meal \$8.00.
Beverages by donation (kids drink soda or water free)

Free and open to the public:

3:30-4:30 Plant Identification Walk led by Darcy Kind and Jean Stramel
3:30-7:30 Beautify Community Garden
4:00-7:00 Bird Banding led by Jerry Simmons
4:30-5:30 Kickapoo Dam History Tour led by Brad Steinmetz
5:30-6:00 David Rhodes, *Driftless* Reading and Booksigning
6:00-7:30 Bird Walk led by Maggie Jones and Cathy Pierce
7:30 on – Campfire and Music Jam with Sinister Dane (bring your instruments)



Chelsea Bagot

Sorting red beans for gallo pinto, Nicaragua's national dish

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

If you would like to help, call Jane Furchgott at (608) 583-2431. 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.