

SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 35

Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project

April 2011

Good Water News

by Jane Furchgott

Walking in Santa Teresa's Chacocente Wildlife Refuge toward the village of La Poma this February, I met three men digging a trench in the ground to bury black plastic pipe. They told me that this was part of the new gravity-feed water system, at this point almost a mile from the water source. The SCP-funded piping runs through the forest, mostly above ground, but is buried in some vulnerable places. The water from two strong artesian wells has been captured to flow as piped water to 27 La Poma homesteads and to its primary school. The system is being extended.

Several families in the community showed me their convenient new running water. Some people had a faucet in the yard, others in the house. Ramiro Medrano took me to visit his mother Delfina, who demonstrated her exciting new ability to water her garden by spraying with a hose.

This water piped in under pressure is especially appreciated by the La Poma women, who used to carry five-gallon pails from the well on their heads. Now water hoses reach their *pilas*, outdoor cement sinks where clothes are washed.

— Continued on page 2



Elizabeth Pflug-Froh

Large numbers of olive ridley hatchlings are needed, as fewer than one in a hundred will reach maturity in the perilous ocean.

1,800,000 Baby Turtles

Jeffer Cruz, Chacocente MARENA (Nicaraguan DNR) director tells us that, after a late start, 2010-11 has turned out to be the best sea turtle arribada (mass nesting) season in ten years. About 55,000 olive ridley nests were laid on the Chacocente beach. And more importantly, a record 1,800,000 hatchlings emerged from these nests in the sand to begin their oceanic life in the Pacific!

Jeffer said that the relationship between Chacocente MARENA and the nearby fishing village of El Astillero has improved. No egg-robbing crowds invaded Chacocente this season, nor did those fishermen purposely kill the turtles at sea. A locally-staffed turtle hatchery on the El Astillero beach (A project of Fauna and Flora International) has become a national tourist attraction. A local women's co-operative, started by Alma Susana Chávez, is selling colorful purses they crochet from recycled plastic bags.

Jeffer now works with four guards from El Astillero and eight guards from Chacocente communities during the arribada season. The SCP will be providing waterproof boots and backpacks for the guards this year. 🌿



Jane Furchgott

Water pressure! Ramiro Medrano sprays gravity-fed water from a hose.



Onofrio with his young banana trees, near El Terrero.

Good Water News, continued

Visiting other communities, I saw how newly-constructed wells and pumps funded by the SCP have helped one farmer to start a banana grove and another to micro-irrigate his excellent vegetable garden.

The SCP has now provided clay filters for drinking water to families and schools in five villages. People in each community told me that the filters had improved their health, eliminating the kidney infections and pain common in previous years. 🌿

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

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. If you'd like to receive the **electronic Sister City Update before the paper copies even arrive, email us at santa-teresa@wccnica.org to let us know.**

Visit us on Facebook!
(Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project)

Secondary School Scholarships

For the first time, the Sister City Project (SCP) is offering secondary school scholarships to five Chacocente students. The Chacocente schools only go to the sixth grade. Rural students have had a hard time continuing their studies unless they can live with relatives in Santa Teresa or another city.

Two years ago, a secondary school was started at La Pitilla, in Chacocente Wildlife Refuge's buffer zone. Three children from the Chacocente villages where the SCP works attended this school last year, but the distance was great, one boy walking two hours in either direction.

This year we plan to give a \$320 scholarship to one child each from the communities of El Papalon, La Poma, Escalante, La Chota and El Terrero. This amount will cover about half the expenses of transportation, meals and school supplies.

The scholarship winners will promise to keep up their grades and to provide some community service, such as tutoring younger children or illiterate adults.

Next year we hope to open the scholarships to new students, and to keep aiding this year's recipients as well. If you would like to help these young people continue their studies, we would appreciate your donation for expanding this program. 🌿



Luis Arteaga attended the La Pitilla secondary school last year, walking two hours each way from his home in Escalante.

Everyone is welcome at our monthly SCP meetings. Call Janet Gee at 608 588-3942 for meeting dates or information about the SCP.

Chacocente Culture Changes

by Jane Furchgott

None of the farmers in Chacocente has a tractor. They plow with oxen. No one has a gas stove. Everyone cooks with firewood. But in the last few years many of the Chacocente families have electric lights and some have televisions. GIZ, the German technical service, offered solar panels at the very reduced price of \$400. Many people bought them, selling cattle to do it, or asking help from city-dwelling grown children. Such a chance might never come again.



Derrick Gee

Solar panels bring electric light and television to Chacocente.

It's hard to understand how the same people who waited for the SCP to fund such basic things as wells and latrines could afford the panels, but one man explained it by telling me, "You helped me get this TV." Although the SCP has never funded electrification, he meant that our help with improving agricultural yields and paying for such things as wells, pumps and school supplies enabled him to save money to realize the previously impossible dream of electricity at home.

One thing I have always liked about the Chacocente village people is their comfort with and pride in their way of life, meeting us Wisconsinites as equals and friends. In an area where a simple life is normal, poverty doesn't make a person feel like a second-class citizen.

Watching Nicaraguan television, I saw a tractor company commercial making fun of plowing with oxen, as if it were something to be ashamed of, unspeakably stone-age. I wonder how the materialism and glamour promoted on TV will affect Chacocente.

Touring the Chacocente communities with Alma Susana in February, I had the distinct impression that families living there were happier and not as poor as ten years ago when our projects were beginning. I think that the SCP's support for basic needs has made a big difference. Also important are two successful new sources of income, backed by GIZ -- the beekeeping cooperative (which SCP helped start) and a three-village ecotourism service cooperative.

We at the SCP recognize that cultural change and outside influence are probably inevitable. The goal of our projects is to provide the people of Chacocente with tools to improve their health, environment, education, food production, and income earning potential -- which allow them to maintain their traditional rural lifestyle with an improved quality of life. Our projects respond to the desires of the community by allowing its members to identify their own needs. By respecting their time-honored practices and cultural autonomy, we hope to preserve the delicate balance between modern convenience and traditional wisdom. 🌱



Jane Furchgott

Juana Cano, a co-op member, prepares food for tourists.

Excerpts from the President's Report on 2010

by Derrick Gee

The challenging economic climate in much of the world has been casting its shadow over Nicaragua. Those Nicaraguans living and working abroad have less funds to remit to their families back home and international aid organizations have less resources to disperse. However, in the micro-environment of Santa Teresa, and especially in the remote villages of the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge where SCP works, the good news probably outweighs the bad. For our people, who live a mostly subsistence life-style, the size of the rice harvest is more significant than the world price of rice. It was a year of heavy rains which hurt some crops and helped others. But it was also a year when the projects which we planned were all completed.

We were in a position to send a record \$27,000 to Nicaragua while spending less than \$2,000 here at home. In spite of the challenging weather, virtually every element of our planned partnership with the communities was fulfilled.



We are excited that, in spite of the difficult economic climate in our homeland, the income we received, mostly from our enthusiastic family of individual supporters, was close to a record. This has encouraged us to plan some innovative, new activities for 2011. Secondary education has been a virtual impossibility for the students of our communities. We hope to address this problem starting with scholarships for five students in 2011. We believe that much is to be gained by establishing small gardens at each of the five elementary schools. The concept of a "Farmer to Farmer" program to facilitate the exchange of ideas will be encouraged. The piped water facility is to be expanded. We will also explore the possibility of a "communal bank" to help families have income-generating projects, including farming, through small loans at modest interest rates.



We could achieve very little without the enthusiasm and skills of our facilitator, Alma Susana Chávez. We have also been encouraged by the contribution to our work of agriculturist Everth Torrez.



It has been an honor to work as your Board president for the last four years, a position from which I'll retire tonight. Our many supporters should know that the

SCP board works tirelessly to see that the resources made available to it are directed to maximum benefit and that the members of these remote communities who partner with us never cease to express their gratitude. 🌿



Aaron Wunnicke

Yasari Zamora and family, El Papalon

2010 Project Summary

- **School Supplies** – for 203 students and their teachers in five schools, plus extra food to supplement the government lunch program.
- **Water Projects** – 101 water filters for home and school use, 18 well rope pumps, materials for three community-built wells, 18 well lids, and five latrines, plus extension of La Poma's water piping.
- **Health** – Twelve training sessions for community health workers, monthly doctor visits, and provision of basic medications.
- **Agriculture** – 78 farmers each received \$50-worth of tools, fencing, fertilizer, or other farming needs, plus training in prevention of soil erosion, ecological fertilizers, and other subjects.
- **Environment** – support for the hatchery for leatherback sea turtles, equipment for forest and beach guards, environmental education workshops in schools, beach clean-up, and help promoting the "I don't eat turtle eggs" campaign. 🌿

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

Visiting the Leatherback Hatchery

by Jane Furchgott

In 2010-11, three female leatherback sea turtles nested at Veracruz, laying 23 nests in all. Because the first female nested before the usual season, only the eggs of the other two leatherbacks (one who nested in previous years and one a new recruit) were saved in the hatchery.

The SCP spent \$1000 last year to help pay the hatchery guards. Why do we do this when so few leatherback turtles nest here? Each leatherback nesting beach on the Central American Pacific coast is of vital importance to the survival of this disappearing species.

The Eastern Pacific leatherback population has collapsed in the past thirty years, due to modern fishing techniques, loss of nesting habitat, and taking of the turtles and their eggs. The Pacific leatherback is listed as critically endangered, with less than 5% of its former numbers still surviving. Local residents say that in the 1980's, a hundred leatherbacks nested at Veracruz in one night.

Set back from the ocean on the steep Veracruz beach, the hatchery's netting-enclosed structures hold the relocated turtle nests. A tin-and-canvas shelter serves as the workers' office.

Eduardo Altamirano, a young biologist employed by Fauna & Flora International, is in charge of the hatchery this season. He works there part time, leaving to bring back food and supplies for the guards and to electronically record the hatchery's data.



José Gabriel Martínez Fonseca

Manuel Berroteran at the leatherback hatchery, where he coordinates the community workers, many of them ex-egg poachers

The Chacocente community members working at the hatchery take all the data. On a 6 or 8-hour rotation, they patrol the beach and relocate, guard, and care for the nests. Manuel Berroteran from the community of Aguas Calientes and Emiliano Lopez from El Quinal were at work the day I visited. Manuel has had eight years of experience at the hatchery, and coordinates the workers.

The temperature of the relocated nests is carefully monitored so that a balanced ratio of female to male hatchlings will emerge. In turtles, the sex is determined in the embryonic stage – temperatures warmer than 85 degrees will produce females, cooler males.

Some baby olive ridley and black turtles were emerging in the hatchery that day, and the guards let me hold a leatherback hatchling. I was very moved to see this tiny endangered turtle, who might someday grow to be six feet long. All the day's hatchlings were placed on damp sand in a covered plastic tub. They would be released after dark, when fewer air and sea predators were active.

The hatchery had always been an outpost of lonely men, but this year Manuel Berroteran's whole family had moved to a nearby house for the season, cooking for the guards and providing a homelike atmosphere.

Eduardo Altamirano recently wrote me that from the hatchery's first two leatherback nests, 131 baby turtles emerged and were set loose to head for the ocean. More nests had hatched out successfully, and the last nests are still incubating and will hatch soon. The number of nesting females this year is low, but higher than last year. In 30 years those hatchlings who reach maturity will return to nest on the Veracruz beach where they were born. 🌿



Alma Susana Chávez

Holding the newly emerged leatherback hatchling

Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project

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Alma Susana Chávez

☀️ **KICKAPOO SPRING FLING!** ☀️ **Food, Fun & Music ☀️ Saturday April 30**

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

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

- 4:00-6:00** Bird Walk, led by Barbara Duerksen
Plant Identification Walk, led by Aaron Wunnicke
Live Raptor Program with falconer Dan Hazlett
- 5:00-7:00** Grilled Brats and Burgers, salads, homemade desserts, Nicaraguan gallo pinto, soft drinks
- 6:00-7:00** “**Hola Chacocente**” stories and slideshow from Nicaragua
- 7:00-9:00** Campfire and Music Jam (bring your instruments)

In addition, there will be a \$10 Raffle (first prize \$600 Emotion kayak, also \$150 Vortex binoculars and \$180 Echo Fly Rod and Ross Reel), a **Silent Auction**, and the famous “**Brew Canoe.**”



Jane Furchgott

Education is important – artist Chelsea shows her picture of her brother’s graduation.

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>